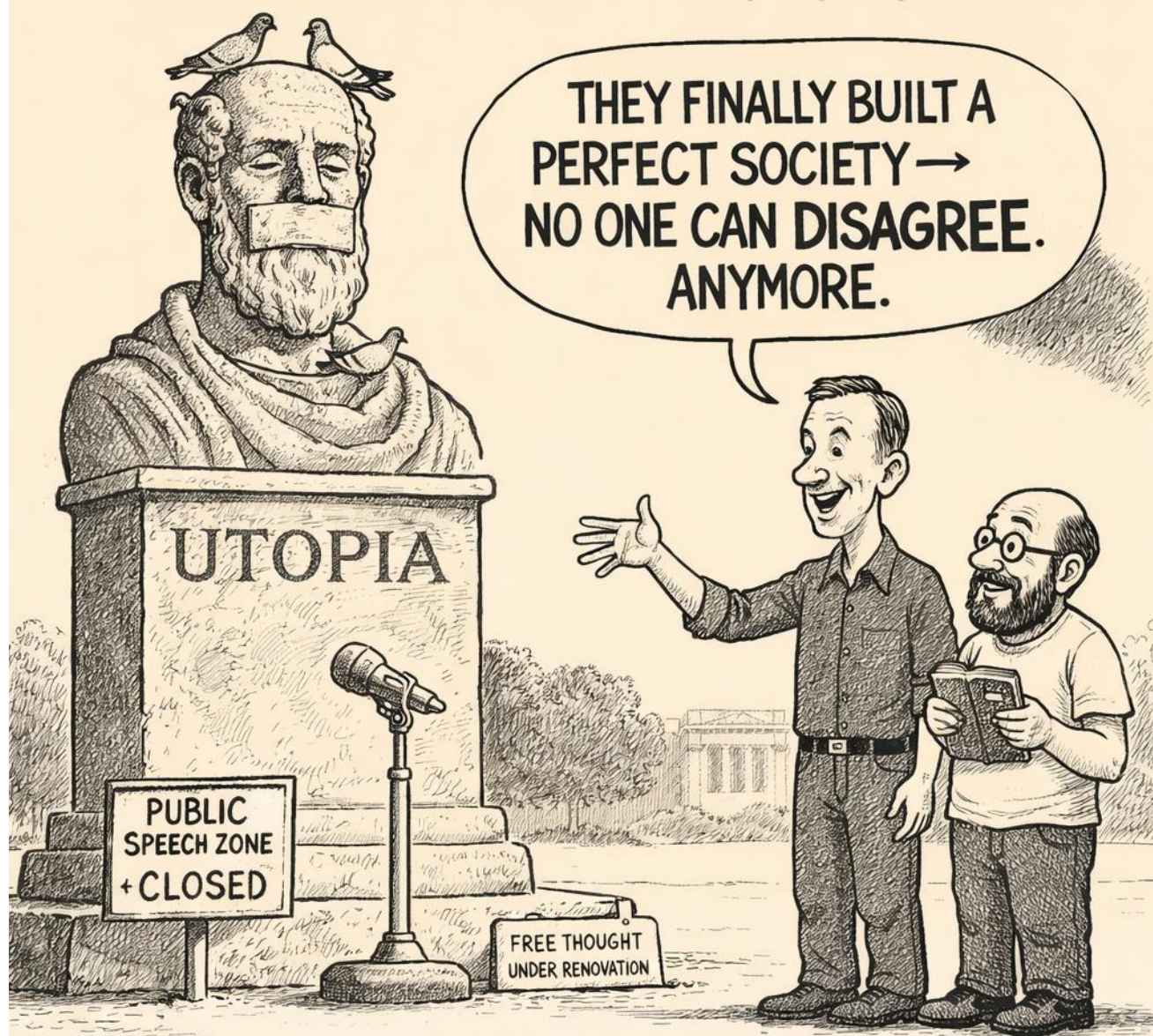


DEAD MEN'S UTOPIAS

THE MISCOMMUNICATION TRILOGY "The Conspiracy of Speech, Vol I."



extended version

by Peter Ayolov

SAMIZDAT 2026

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Part 5
(Extended version)*

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*(*The extended version expands the original text to accommodate a significantly larger body of material that could not be contained within a first four parts, allowing the argument to unfold with greater depth, continuity, and conceptual precision. It is written as a more comprehensive and elaborated version of the original, preserving its core structure while integrating additional analyses, examples, and theoretical developments that extend the scope of the work.)*

Introduction: Dead Voices: Echoes Without Origin

*“Nobody owns anything, but everyone is rich -
for what greater wealth can there be than cheerfulness,
peace of mind, and freedom from anxiety?”*

— Thomas More, *Utopia*

Dusty Bookcases

At the time I was finishing my first book “The Economic Policy of Online Media, Manufacturing Dissent” I moved to a new office due to a renovation. The Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at Sofia University in Bulgaria is a beautiful 19th. century building next to the university botanical garden in the center of the city, and it needs constant maintenance. The “new” office looked really old with its bulky and dusty bookcases, their shelves stacked with books, magazines, old dissertations, and graduation theses. In a moment of procrastination and doubting the merits of my future book, I decided to examine the inside of the oldest and dustiest bookcases. Except for the half-empty bottles from some academic parties, they were crowded with outdated ideology and propaganda. The dustier layer held numerous books from the era of the socialist People's Republic of Bulgaria, featuring the most luxurious editions published by the official presses of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The most intriguing detail was that they could be easily classify by the years of the Communist Party Congresses in Bulgaria. You could trace the new party line with new plans and goals, the new enemies and friends, and the emerging new subideology with its new buzzwords and slogans. The newest books inside the bookcases were dated around 1989. In 1990, the XIV Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party took place, after which it changed its name to the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Some of the less dusty books on the shelves were published between 1990 and the present, spanning the thirty-four years of democracy in the Republic of Bulgaria. After a quick glance at them, it turned out that you can also classify them according to the new trends in political ideologies since the 90s. There were no official party publishing houses, but the political bias was evident and there was the support from different grants and foundations, just to check your ideological compass. To be honest, my first thought was that my future book would end up on these shelves one day, and I was right. After that, it occurred to me that the ideological language wasn't so different before and after 1990. The buzzwords, slogans, values, and beliefs were opposite in meaning but the structure of persuasion and propaganda were similar. Even the names of some of the authors were the same. Switching sides after the fall of the Iron Curtain was natural. It is the most human thing to do. The ruling ideas are always the ideas of the ruling parties. Or to be more exact the published ideas are always the politically correct ones. If you want your name to be famous you must be a bigot. But were the authors more honest before or after 1990? Or was it all like Havel's Greengrocer, writing slogans as fashion or just for career development? In his 1978 Harvard address, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn critiqued the West for focusing excessively on personal rights, while moral responsibility. “Legally your researchers are free, but they are conditioned by the fashion of the day. There is no open violence such as in the East; however, a selection dictated by fashion and the need to match mass standards frequently prevent independent-minded people from making their contribution to public life. There is a dangerous tendency to flock together and shut off

successful development.”¹ Today you can also choose your research topic dictated by the fashion of political correctness and the need to match the standards of the ruling party. From a linguistic perspective, the concept of "political correctness" appears to stem from the intention to avoid marginalizing certain identity groups through language. The linguistic relativity hypothesis suggests that our thought processes shape our perception of reality and are, in turn, shaped by the language we use. This means that language not only reflects our worldview but also reveals and reinforces our implicit biases. Hence, for example, the use of biased language perpetuates ill effects in the ideological group and must be censored or canceled. In the bubble of the group speak the individual is indoctrinated almost as in cult. Every ideological language has a performative effect on its user even if he is just pretending. A buzzword works even if you don't believe in it or even understand it. Many of these authors are gone and their books will be forgotten. What will be the fate of these luxurious editions of books full of outdated dead men's utopias? You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture, just get people to stop reading them, says Ray Bradbury. "The problem in our country isn't with books being banned, but with people no longer reading. Look at the magazines, and the newspapers around us – it's all junk, all trash, tidbits of news. The average TV ad has 120 images a minute. Everything just falls off your mind²." You just take the old propaganda books off the shelves and pile them inside the bookcases. For sure only a few people will read them, or exactly said only a few people will flip through. These books were part of the power structure of society and lost their meaning with time. The ideas of the ruling parties suddenly become just an information waste. It is almost like a tower of books and ideas that holds the political system and suddenly collapses. They become only a memory of a dead men's utopias. But why are new utopias so important for human mankind? The books that are still on the shelves use the same ideological language of propaganda and a bright future. It is almost like an inherent quality of every complex language. In order to unite large groups of people their common language must build utopias. One utopia is not enough. It is always plural because the original utopia is upgraded with time and changes constantly. The coming new ideology must replace the old one. The failed promises must be replaced with new slogans and buzzwords. The old ones are buried under a heap of information waste. So, it is a constant building of castles made of words, which eventually melt into the sea of language. Almost as if the ideologies are made to break just to keep the concept of utopia alive. The stories clash and fade away, but the language is the same. As if every ideological language has an inherent kill switch to destroy any creation myth or political philosophy if it poses a threat to the semantic equilibrium. Every complex system of words is basically a slogan that expires with time and needs to be replaced and forgotten. It is a constant cycle of new and new beliefs with short periods of disbelief. Repeating manufacture of consent and dissent at the same time. Communication is a condition for social life along with miscommunication. Utopias turned into dystopias. Wisdom is followed by stupidity.

Nonsensical Propositions

¹ Solzhenitsyn, A. (1978). Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn Center — A World Split Apart. [online] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn Center. Available at: <https://www.solzhenitsyncenter.org/a-world-split-apart>.

² "Bradbury Still Believes in Heat of 'Fahrenheit 451'", interview by Misha Berson, (12 March 1993) | The Seattle Times. [online] Available at: <https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=19930312&slug=1689996>. (Accessed: 15 August 2024).

The latent dysfunction of speech and systemic distortion of communication can be called a planned obsolescence of language and is a premise to a proposed miscommunication axiom. The research on the planned obsolescence of language follows the tradition of the critique of language and ideas of Fritz Mauthner and Ludwig Wittgenstein. It is not critical of the language itself as a tool for communication but of the use of ideological language as a political weapon for indoctrination, control, and domination. It seems more and more that this type of linguistic weapon is penetrating all levels of human societies across the world. There is no great hope for change and a slim possibility of peace in the communication war and the creation of a more just world information order. What is more foreseeable is that every dangerous idea and every ideological language anticipates its destruction. Wittgenstein put his faith in the inherent quality of complex language to create nonsense and tautologies and eventually in time to cancel itself out. In philosophy, this metaphor is called Wittgenstein's ladder, because of proposition 6.54 of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright³." Every linguistic construction has a possibility for miscommunication that can lead to destruction. Every story can be used for domination and bring suffering and death. Even those who remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Even free access to written history and mass education can guarantee the same old propaganda slogans from every pole of the political spectrum will not be used again. The phenomenon of collective stupidity is becoming even more evident with mass communication and social networks. Real-time translation and the monopoly of standard languages make people more susceptible to irrational forces, whether intentionally or not. Never underestimate the power of stupid people in large groups, says George Carlin. It is like a phenomenon of the stupidity of the crowds where the sum of many individuals united in a herd equals the lower limit of intelligence. Collective stupidity is the side effect of large communities and especially in periods of democratization. Today the linguistic groups are getting larger with half of the population of the world speaking less than 25 official languages from 7000 still existing and thousands of dialects. It looks like nothing can protect people from the monopoly of global languages. Only a God can destroy the Tower of Babel and bring back the plain speaking and clear understanding of small group dialects. What if this god is in the machine of language? *Deus in machina linguae*! An inherent mechanism for the destruction of the linguistic tower of power. If we follow the history of the dangerous political ideas it looks like they work as self-consuming concepts that soon become obsolete and are replaced by new ones.

Chauffeurs Knowledge

Novelty is the ultimate principle of language. Everything possible to be said will be said, just because of the novelty principle. New and new ideologies and stories will be invented and will replace the old ones no matter if they are better or more meaningful. The increasing complexity of standard languages leads to systemic miscommunication and collective stupidity as a rule. Large language models (LLM) and Generative AI are just imitating collective thinking, speaking, and writing in a way that reminds me of Woody Allen's joke, "Life doesn't

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, Russell, B. and Charles Kay Ogden (1992). *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. London ; New York: Routledge.

imitate art, it imitates bad television.” The rule of the television is again a novelty, nothing turns heads like the most banal events presented as TV news. All this waste of information just hides the systemic miscommunication. Collective stupidity is not ignorance it is a choice, it is pretending to be ignorant together with the thousands and millions around you. The madness and stupidity of the crowds are not something that can be controlled by the educated elites. This can be illustrated with a retelling of the old Max Planck’s Chauffeur Test anecdote. As a part of a joke, the chauffeur memorized the words and gave a public lecture on the new quantum mechanics pretending to be Professor Plank. When asked a question by the crowd he said that the question is so easy that even his chauffeur can reply, pointing towards Max Plank. What was the goal of this public lecture on quantum mechanics? To propagate a faith in science and to promote the name of a Nobel Prize winner or to make the audience understand quantum mechanics. To know the name of something or to know something. Any public speaking is addressed to the audience as a group. What if it turns out that the crowd likes the speech of the chauffeur better? What if the audience is made up of chauffeurs only? What will be the taste of these audiences if it grows in numbers? Will the size of the crowd affect the content of the lecture? The growing number of “chauffeurs” listening to the lecture will influence the speaker and his language. Every influencer is influenced by his audience and the speeches of every dictator are dictated by the crowds. Is it really possible for the speaker to control the masses with logic and rationality? It works only with small groups of people who trust each other. The growing number of listeners diminished the freedom of the speaker as he was required to speak in a way that reflected the feelings and desires of the crowd. A great example is the final speech in the movie “The Great Dictator”. Chaplin dedicated several months to carefully drafting and revising the speech that concludes the film—a heartfelt plea for peace delivered by the barber who has been mistaken for Hynkel. The speech at the end of the film sparked considerable debate—some criticized it as unnecessary, while others found it uplifting. However, the true power of Chaplin’s words lies in their ambiguity. It’s unclear whether the speech was meant as a sincere call for peace and democracy or as a subtle warning about the dangerous allure of rhetoric. The fact that any ordinary person—a barber or a painter like Hitler—can use language to promise utopia and peace, yet lead the masses toward war and destruction, highlights the peril of persuasive speech. In this light, the voice of power emerges as something far greater and more dangerous than any individual, revealing the unsettling truth that language, when wielded before the masses, can control and manipulate even the most well-intentioned of men. In the film “The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema”, Slavoj Žižek astutely observes the traumatic dimension of the human voice in cinema, particularly in Charlie Chaplin’s “The Great Dictator”. Žižek points out that Chaplin was acutely aware of the human voice not as a sublime, ethereal medium for expressing the depths of human subjectivity, but as a foreign intruder—something that disrupts and controls us. The problem that “The Great Dictator” confronts is not just the political issue of resisting totalitarianism and its seductive power, but also a more formal challenge: how to cope with the terrifying power of the voice. Since we cannot simply rid ourselves of this voice, the question becomes how to domesticate it—how to transform it into a vehicle for expressing humanity, love, and understanding. Yet, Žižek hints at the deeper irony: it is not the man who controls the voice, but rather the voice and language that exert control over the man. When Chaplin’s character delivers his famous speech advocating for love and mutual understanding, there’s a double irony. The people applaud his words in the same way they had cheered for Hynkel. Furthermore, the music accompanying this supposedly humanist

message is the overture to Wagner's Lohengrin, the same music that plays during Hynkel's daydreams of world conquest with the globe-shaped balloon. This unsettling parallel reveals the voice's power to shape, manipulate, and even control human behavior, blurring the lines between good and evil, between genuine human connection and the seductive allure of totalitarian rhetoric. Even the dictators and elites are under the spell of their own voice and language.

Dead Men's Propaganda

There is a slim hope that in the future algorithms can control the destructive language of harmful propaganda. What if Large Language Models (LLM) and Generative AI are only echo chambers that calculate the language of the masses? Just another tool that can serve the same destructive tendencies as other technologies in the past. It looks like the madness and stupidity of the crowds can be controlled naturally only from inside the language. When the hollow premise of every utopia is revealed the language of propaganda cannot hold its users together. Gradually the meaning of slogans disappears, and they eventually become just road signs. The unbearable lightness of language is revealed. The utopia of communication is based on the myth that it can be a perfect language. The most dangerous side of any ideology is that using divine words is an excuse to stop thinking. Following commands is a matter of faith and people honor that form of voluntary ignorance. The utopian and ideological language permeates all spheres of today's society. This divine language, which has historically served as a tool for crafting new utopian visions, gets canceled by itself. The cyclical process of reconstructing ideologies is essential for knowledge production in power systems. Each generation inevitably leaves behind its own "dead men's propaganda⁴," a residue of ideological language that once sought to define a utopia but now serves as a relic for future scholars to dissect and reinterpret. This language becomes part of your inner dialogue as a mechanism of control exerted by societal voices you have internalized, which are often not your own. These voices — representing influential societal figures — create commands within your mind, constantly demanding that you conform to societal expectations. This internal cacophony is largely designed to ensure that you conform to norms and seek validation from society. Your inner voices are just like your grandparents' voices that demand you to become someone respectful and fulfill society's stereotype. The critical point is that society uses language as a tool to shape and control your inner world. An abstract entity using abstract language for control and assimilation. Using official language societal leaders and institutions influence how you think about yourself, as a form of conditioning. Quiet experiences of silence and mindfulness, that are outside the societal propaganda machine are deemed dangerous. Society thrives on motion, consumption, anxiety, and dissatisfaction so inevitably the official language serves this purpose. It relies on you being restless, incomplete, and always striving for more, whereas moments of happiness⁵ are still, quiet, and self-contained. In peace and silence, you can find your own voice and escape from the oppressive control of societal language with its expectations and commands. But by rejecting the language of those in power you risk being marginalized or dismissed. Even simply pointing out the wrongs in society could result in being labeled insane. This is an inversion

⁴ Rantanen, T. (2024). *Dead Men's Propaganda*. LSE Press.

⁵ Vaknin, S. (2020). *Change Your Inner Dialog, Narrative Plot* | Vaknin Talks. [online] Vaknin-talks.com. Available at: https://vaknin-talks.com/transcripts/Change_Your_Inner_Dialog_Narrative_Plot/ [Accessed 9 Sep. 2024].

where truth-tellers are discredited while harmful, outdated ideologies and "dead men's utopias" govern the actions of global powers. John Lennon's statement⁶ in a 1968 BBC-2 interview highlights the role of individual thinking and suspicion that world governments are driven by irrational and destructive ideas: "I think our society is run by insane people for insane objectives. And I think that's what I sussed when I was sixteen and twelve, way down the line. But I expressed it differently all through my life. It's the same thing I'm expressing all the time. But now I can put it into that sentence that I think we're being run by maniacs for maniacal ends, you know. If anybody can put on paper what our government, and the American government, and the Russian, Chinese... what they are all trying to do, and what they think they're doing, I'd be very pleased to know what they think they're doing. I think they're all insane. But I am liable to be put away as insane for expressing that, you know. That's what is insane about it. I mean, don't you agree?" By asserting that he "sussed it out" at such a young age, Lennon emphasizes the role of individual critical thinking in recognizing societal flaws. This challenges the passive acceptance of the official language and suggests that young people are capable of perceiving deeper truths, even when those in power continue to follow irrational or harmful paths. It's intriguing that Lennon mentions governments' inability to "put on paper" what they are doing because it highlights how their objectives are so irrational or absurd that they defy coherent explanations. This speaks to the idea that much of their language is either deliberately vague or meaningless, masking the true nature of their actions. Lennon's critique suggests that the language used by governments is not just unclear but intentionally obfuscates reality, making it impossible to transparently communicate their goals. This reflects the broader concept of miscommunication, where language is distorted to maintain power and control, rendering it absurd and disconnected from truth. The "planned obsolescence" reflects a language that no longer functions to foster understanding but instead serves to obscure, control, and perpetuate power. In this sense, the madness and absurdity Lennon describes aren't accidental, but rather a symptom of how language itself is manipulated until it becomes ineffective, perhaps as a sign of the collapse of overly complex, disconnected political systems.

Self-Consuming Concepts

The hope that new generations will break free from the interplay between ideology and utopia in big societies is also part of utopian thinking. The intellectual span of a generation often exceeds its biological one, making it difficult to fully break away from the ideological language that has been inherited. Nevertheless, the planned obsolescence of ideological language is a necessary component of intellectual progress. It allows for the continuous renewal of ideas and the reimagining of utopian visions, ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge remains dynamic and ever-evolving. In this way, the cycle of ideological language and its eventual obsolescence serves not as a barrier, but as a catalyst for the ongoing transformation of speech and thought. The idea of "Self-Consuming Concepts"⁷ can be intriguingly connected to the

⁶ www.beatlesinterviews.org. (n.d.). John Lennon Interview: Release 6/6/1968 - Beatles Interviews Database. [online] Available at: <http://www.beatlesinterviews.org/db1968.0606.beatles.html/> [Accessed 9 Sep. 2024].

⁷ Magnus, B. (1989). Self-Consuming Concepts. *International Studies in Philosophy*, 21(2), pp.63–71. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5840/intstudphil198921269>.

planned obsolescence of language, a notion that suggests language and the concepts it conveys are deliberately designed or evolved to become obsolete, outdated, or self-destructive over time. The idea of self-consuming concepts revolves around the idea that certain philosophical ideas contain the seeds of their demise. Similarly, the planned obsolescence of language implies that certain linguistic constructs are inherently unstable or designed to degrade over time. In both cases, the concepts or languages are not built to last but are instead expected to evolve, degrade, or be replaced. Intrinsic Instability, ambiguity, and obsolescence are connected with language evolution and dialectical processes. The dialectical nature of thought involves the creation, confrontation, and eventual synthesis or negation of concepts. Language undergoes a similar process, where words, meanings, and expressions evolve, confront new realities, and are eventually replaced. This evolution can be seen as a planned or inevitable obsolescence, where older forms of language are consumed and replaced by new ones. This is a meta-ideological process and affects all knowledge production. For example, even religious traditions with a span of thousands of years are marked with periodical changes of the cannon to fit the zeitgeist. These changes are often the result of the obsolescence of the old doctrines. Ideological language, which often tries to encapsulate complex ideas and systems of belief, can be particularly prone to self-consumption. When taken to their logical extremes, these concepts may implode under their contradictions. In the context of language, this can manifest as slogans or buzzwords that lose their meaning or become counterproductive over time. Planned obsolescence in language can thus be seen as a natural consequence of the self-consuming nature of these ideological constructs. This highlights the importance of cultural and temporal contexts. Just as a philosophical concept might be relevant in one era but become obsolete in another, language is also tied to its time and place. Words and phrases that are powerful in one context may become meaningless or even detrimental as contexts shift. The idea of self-consuming ideas also intersects with power dynamics. Those in power may intentionally craft language in a way that serves immediate purposes but is designed to be discarded or reinterpreted as needed. This controlled obsolescence allows for the manipulation of discourse, much like how self-consuming concepts can be used to maintain or challenge power structures. Both philosophical ideas and linguistic constructs can be designed or evolve to self-destruct over time. Whether through inherent contradictions or deliberate design, the instability and eventual obsolescence of language and concepts reveal the transient nature of both thought and communication. This interplay underscores the dynamic and often fleeting nature of the tools we use to understand and describe our world.

Cultural Kill Switch

The idea that the mechanism of self-consuming concepts could function as a safety trigger against the dangers posed by violent political ideologies and the complex languages of power and domination is a fascinating proposition. A built-in self-destruction of concepts and ideas to prevent the destruction of people and their environment. A hidden linguistic mechanism as a safeguard for the dark side of language. This concept suggests that the inherent instability or self-destructive tendencies within certain ideologies and linguistic constructs serve as a safeguard, preventing them from perpetuating unchecked harm over time. If auto-destructive concepts act as a built-in shutdown mechanism, they carry within them the seeds of their

undoing. This means that as these ideologies or languages of power reach their zenith, they also approach a critical point where their internal contradictions, overreach, or inherent flaws cause them to collapse. This collapse could be seen as a natural protective mechanism, preventing the ideology from causing indefinite harm. The prevention of total domination of one ideology over a certain time and place. Totalitarian regimes and oppressive systems often rely on complex and manipulative language to maintain control. If the language itself is designed to self-consume and expire, it would eventually undermine the system's ability to sustain its grip on power. As the language deteriorates—becoming increasingly hollow, contradictory, or meaningless—the ideology loses its ability to convincingly dominate the populace. A turning point of ideological exhaustion is reached. Political ideologies, especially those that are violent or extreme, often have a limited lifespan due to their radical nature. The self-consuming nature of these ideologies ensures that they burn out rather than achieve stable, lasting dominance. This mechanism might manifest through ideological exhaustion, where the ideology can no longer sustain itself because it has stretched its foundational concepts too thin, leading to internal collapse or widespread disillusionment. It is time for a cultural and linguistic reset. As these ideologies and their associated languages consume themselves, they leave space for cultural and linguistic renewal. The collapse of one system creates an opportunity for new, potentially more just and balanced, systems to emerge. This reset can be seen as a natural cycle, where the end of one ideological or linguistic era paves the way for new approaches that are less susceptible to the same pitfalls. Self-consuming concepts might also resist co-optation by oppressive forces. As an ideology or language becomes more rigid and dogmatic, it loses the flexibility that allowed it to gain power initially. This rigidity can lead to its downfall, as it becomes incapable of adapting to new challenges or internal dissent, further accelerating its decline. If we consider this mechanism as a deliberate or natural safeguard, it could imply that the very complexity and contradictions inherent in dominant ideologies and languages contain the blueprint for their downfall. This offers a more optimistic view of history and human society, suggesting that even the most oppressive systems are not invulnerable and are subject to eventual collapse due to their internal flaws. However, this also raises important questions about how society can accelerate or influence this process. Understanding the self-consuming nature of harmful ideologies and languages could empower individuals and movements to expose these flaws, hastening the collapse of oppressive systems. It could also inform the creation of new ideologies and languages that are more resistant to corruption and more aligned with human values. The idea of self-consuming concepts as a kill switch against violent political ideologies and complex languages of power and domination provides a hopeful perspective on the evolution of ideas and language. It suggests that the very traits that make certain ideologies and languages powerful also contain the potential for their undoing. This built-in obsolescence could be seen as a natural defense mechanism within the fabric of thought and communication, ensuring that no single ideology or language of power can maintain dominance indefinitely. “As societies grow decadent, the language grows decadent, too. Words are used to disguise, not to illuminate, action: you liberate a city by destroying it. Words are to confuse, so that at election time people will solemnly vote against their own interests⁸.” says Gore Vidal in his book “The Decline and Fall of the American Empire”.

⁸ Vidal, G. (1992). *The Decline and Fall of the American Empire*. Odonian Press.

Breaking the Cycle

The idea of a cultural kill switch against dangerous political ideologies and complex systems of power can be connected historically to cycles of debt cancellation. Jubilees were seen as moments of revelation or apocalypse that exposed complex lies and myths, ultimately serving as a means of societal renewal and simplification. The concept of the Jubilee originates from the ancient Hebrew tradition, where every 50 years, debts were forgiven, slaves were freed, and the land was returned to its original owners. This practice, as described in the Book of Leviticus, was meant to reset the social and economic order, preventing the permanent accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few. It was a radical form of societal renewal, aimed at breaking cycles of exploitation and restoring balance. In many ancient societies, debt cancellation was seen not just as an economic necessity but as a moral and spiritual act. It was often portrayed as a moment of apocalypse—derived from the Greek word "apokalypsis," meaning "unveiling" or "revelation." These events revealed the underlying truths about the inequalities and injustices that had built up over time, stripping away the myths and complex justifications that had been used to maintain the status quo. Throughout history, societies have often fallen into periods of increasing complexity, where systems of debt, power, and language become so intricate and burdensome that they begin to collapse under their weight. The Jubilee or debt cancellation can be seen as a deliberate simplification—a way to clear the slate and start anew. This reset was not just economic but also cultural and linguistic, as it often involved the dismantling of the complex myths and ideologies that justified the existing order. Just as debt cycles build up unsustainable pressures that eventually require a reset, complex political ideologies and languages of power create a web of myths and lies that can only be maintained for so long. These ideologies, by their nature, are self-consuming because they create contradictions and tensions that cannot be indefinitely sustained. When these concepts reach a breaking point, they collapse, much like a society that can no longer bear the weight of its debts. The collapse of these complex systems—whether through a Jubilee or the self-destruction of an ideology—serves as a revelation. It unveils the underlying truths that had been obscured by layers of complexity and deception. This process of apocalypse leads to a simplification of human life, where the false complexities are stripped away, and society can return to more fundamental and equitable principles. The historical cycles of debt cancellation and the concept of self-consuming ideologies both highlight a pattern of renewal through collapse. When systems become too complex and unjust, they eventually consume themselves, leading to a period of renewal. This renewal often involves a return to simpler, more honest ways of organizing society—whether through the resetting of economic relations or the rejection of oppressive ideologies. In the modern world, where economic systems, political ideologies, and even language itself can become overwhelmingly complex, the idea of a built-in kill switch that leads to renewal is increasingly relevant. The cyclical nature of these collapses serves as a reminder that complexity and power cannot grow indefinitely without consequence. Just as ancient societies used Jubilees to restore balance, there may be a need for contemporary forms of "apocalypse" or revelation that simplify and reset our social, economic, and political systems. The connection between self-consuming concepts, cycles of debt cancellation, and moments of revelation points to a deep historical pattern: as societies become more complex and dominated by intricate systems of power and language, they also create the conditions for their collapse. These collapses, whether through economic Jubilees or the downfall of ideologies, serve as necessary resets that strip away the lies and myths, revealing the truth and

simplifying human life. This cyclical process of complexity leading to collapse and renewal is a powerful mechanism for maintaining balance and preventing the unchecked accumulation of power and domination.

Castles made of sand

Ideological language, much like the stories we tell ourselves, serves as a powerful tool in the continuous crafting of utopias—grand visions of perfect societies that reflect the ideals and dreams of those who conjure them. Yet, just as these utopian constructs emerge from the fertile imagination, they also carry within them the seeds of their obsolescence. Language, after all, is not static; it evolves, decays, and eventually falls out of sync with the ever-shifting realities it seeks to describe. This planned obsolescence of ideological language is not merely a flaw but a natural and necessary process. It allows for the perpetual cycle of constructing and deconstructing ideas, ensuring that the concept of utopia remains fluid, forever out of reach, and thus eternally compelling. However, the same language that builds utopias also constructs their darker counterparts—dystopias. These imagined worlds, often depicted as bleak and oppressive, offer a counterbalance to utopian ideals. Dystopias ground our utopian fantasies in a more sobering reality, reminding us that the pursuit of perfection can lead to its opposite. Dystopias may be closer to the truth of human experience, serving as cautionary tales that highlight the potential dangers of unchecked ideologies. The process of building and destroying these ideological "castles made of sand" is, in essence, a cyclical one. Ideologies are designed to be broken, their language intentionally ephemeral, to make room for new ideas, and new visions. This cycle ensures that we are not trapped in the utopias of past generations—those "dead men's utopias" that, if left unchallenged, could ossify into dystopias for the living. Thus, the obsolescence of language, miscommunication, and the inevitable decay of information are not merely signs of failure but indicators of a dynamic and adaptive culture. A culture that, through the continuous creation and destruction of both utopias and dystopias, maintains a balance between aspiration and reality. It is in this balance that we find the true value of ideological language—not as a permanent fixture, but as a tool for perpetual renewal that ensures that ideas do not become stagnant or oppressive. By allowing concepts to consume themselves—to rise, reach their peak, and then fall into disuse or transformation—society creates space for new ideas, new voices, and new expressions. This cyclical process mirrors the eternal recurrence, where destruction is not an end but a precursor to rebirth. It is through this cyclical renewal that balance is preserved, ensuring that no single voice, idea, or concept can exert unchecked power over time. The Tower of Babel is doomed to collapse. In the poetic words of Jimmy Hendrix, "And so castles made of sand melt into the sea eventually." After the failure of religious, political, bureaucratic, scientific, and technical languages to avoid miscommunication, humanity puts its last hope for mutual understanding in computer-generated language. Large language models (LLM) are about generating your speech and summarizing what you read and listen to. It is sending messages on your behalf, and at the same time reading and answering. Almost as a private secretary to a very busy CEO who is sending greeting cards to his family on his behalf. The students are not writing but generating essays using chatbots and the teachers are not reading but summarizing the texts using the same bots. Not much sincerity and personal connection. Just automatic responses as a ritual of ostentatious communication. Just large language models talking between themselves. So, what kind of language can bring people together? What about poetry? It seems like the words of writers and

poets live longer than the words of kings, presidents and scientists. Rock song lyrics are the last form of poetry that is extremely popular amongst billions of people who memorize them as religious text. The words of Jimmy Hendrix seem free from the corruption of the language of power and domination. In the words of the artist Jonas Mekas, “In the very end, civilizations perish because they listen to their politicians and not to their poets.” But is it like that? Is poetry, literature, and speech as an art form the last sanctuary of the divine language that cannot harm? Poetry, often seen as a refined and sensitive art form, has also been a powerful tool for tyranny and propaganda. Throughout history, dictators such as Nero, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Kim Il-sung, Radovan Karadžić, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden have written poetry, using it to craft narratives that glorify their rule and manipulate the emotions of their followers. While poetry is typically associated with beauty and delicacy, in the hands of these rulers, it becomes a weapon of control, sentimentality, and even violence. Nero, the Roman emperor, used his poetry and performances to shape a delusional image of himself as a tragic artist, while his cruel actions wreaked havoc on Rome. Many powerful leaders, while publicly scorning aesthetic intellectuals, also harbored artistic ambitions, channeling their frustrations into political agendas and mastering propaganda as a form of art. In each case, poetry was far from innocent. These leaders understood the emotional and symbolic power of verse, using it to humanize their tyranny, justify their violence, and manipulate their people. Poetry, with its ability to evoke deep emotions and create compelling narratives, became a dangerous tool in the hands of these dictators, blurring the line between artistic beauty and political brutality. Throughout history poetry was used as a tool of control, revealing the unsettling connection between the language of the poet and the language of the dictator. Just as in “The Great Dictator”, where the barber delivers a speech in place of the tyrant, softening the cruelty of power with human warmth, these leaders cloaked their brutal ambitions in the eloquence of verse. The lyrical and often sentimental quality of their poetry masked the violence of their regimes, allowing them to present a facade of intellectualism and sensitivity while consolidating absolute control. This poetic language, much like the barber’s speech, softened the edge of dictatorship, making their messages more palatable and even emotionally stirring. But while the barber’s words in the film bring hope, the words of dictators serve to manipulate, using the beauty of language to obscure the reality of their oppressive actions. They blended the romanticism of poetry with the cold logic of power, making their rhetoric both seductive and dangerous.

The Great Speech

The anecdote of the barber standing in for the dictator in “The Great Dictator” highlights how language can humanize or dehumanize, depending on its intent. Poetry is not just artistic expression but a means of blurring the boundaries between art and propaganda, turning the language of beauty into a tool of tyranny. Carefully crafted words sought to dominate both minds and hearts, merging artistic authorship and authoritarian artistry. Charlie Chaplin's involvement in political discourse through “The Great Dictator” reveals the complex intersection between art, propaganda, and power. In the film, Chaplin uses the voice of the barber to deliver a speech advocating for humanity and peace, standing in for the dictator. This metaphor captures the power of language—whether in art or politics—to shape minds and movements. However, Chaplin’s role in public life went beyond the screen. As the United States hesitated to enter World War II, Chaplin, a British citizen, used his platform to criticize

fascism and advocate for intervention, which led to his being accused of promoting pro-war propaganda⁹. His speeches, particularly his call for opening a second front in Europe, were interpreted by many as pro-Communist, especially in a political climate already suspicious of Soviet Russia. Chaplin's art and public statements were increasingly viewed through a political lens, ultimately leading to his exile from the United States. Ironically, the man who gave one of cinema's most famous speeches for humanity and freedom became a victim of the very political machinery he sought to critique. Chaplin's experience shows that the language of art, like the language of dictators, can be perceived as dangerous, especially when it challenges the political status quo. Thus, even as Chaplin sought to use his art for peace, it was co-opted into the narratives of propaganda, proving that no artistic expression exists in isolation from political consequences. Charlie Chaplin finds his political voice with his first sound films, particularly in "The Great Dictator". Breaking the silence that had defined his career as the Tramp, Chaplin used his voice to deliver bold political messages. His transition from silent film to sound was not just a technical shift—it marked a deeper transformation where his art became explicitly political. He advocated for peace, unity, and democracy, but this newfound voice soon became controversial and even dangerous. At the 1941 gala for Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration¹⁰ Chaplin was invited to repeat his "Great Dictator" speech, where he passionately declared, "You, the people, have the power... let us all unite!" While this speech was intended as a plea for unity, it increasingly became viewed as politically charged, especially in the tense atmosphere of the time. Later, during a fundraiser for Russian war relief, Chaplin gave another speech, planned for just four minutes, but ended up speaking for forty, calling for unity across political ideologies to win the war. His remarks, including statements like "if that's communism, there's a lot of people in the United States that'll vote for it," were seen as very dangerous in an era of growing suspicion. Chaplin, having long remained silent, now found himself unable to stop speaking, but his words were increasingly perceived as dangerous. Words in the mouths of popular figures shape the boundaries of what entire nations can achieve. It is said that no mother would willingly send her son to war without the influence of propaganda. What began as a speech for peace and unity in "The Great Dictator" was later interpreted as war propaganda and communist sympathies, leading to mounting scrutiny. Chaplin's political voice, once seen as inspiring, became a source of controversy, ultimately contributing to his downfall in America. Chaplin faced accusations of communist sympathies, and his personal life, including a paternity suit and marriages to much younger women, sparked public and media outrage. An FBI investigation followed, leading to his forced departure from the U.S. in 1952 and eventual relocation to Switzerland. After his exile, his films took on a noticeably darker tone. Having found his voice both artistically with sound cinema and politically through his beliefs, Chaplin became disillusioned, losing his once-hopeful faith in the future and the inherent goodness of people. It was as if the "voice" of the dictator Hynkel, the character he portrayed in "The Great Dictator", had affected him. He came to realize that even his famous speech for unity and peace

⁹ Menand, L. (2023). The War on Charlie Chaplin. [online] The New Yorker. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/11/20/charlie-chaplin-vs-america-scott-eyman-book-review/> (Accessed: 15 August 2024).

¹⁰ Charlie Chaplin (2020). Charlie Chaplin - Speech from The Great Dictator at Franklin D. Roosevelt's Third Inaugural Gala. [online] YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQRThCFU5vQ> [Accessed 4 Sep. 2024].

was just empty rhetoric in the face of the world's harsh realities. Abandoning the Tramp, his later works—"Monsieur Verdoux" (1947), "Limelight" (1952), "A King in New York" (1957), and "A Countess from Hong Kong" (1967)—reflected this growing cynicism. As if the music accompanying his last films is again Wagner's "Lohengrin" overture, the same piece playing during Hynkel's fantasies of world domination. The same disturbing parallel underscores how the poetic voice of dictators can manipulate and control, blurring the line between good and evil and between true connection and totalitarian allure. The main idea of Wagner's "Lohengrin" is the conflict between faith and doubt, trust and suspicion. It reflects on how human weakness, particularly the inability to fully trust and accept the unknown, can lead to the loss of something transcendent.

Tools of Shallow Thinking

In Plato's famous dialogue *Phaedrus*, Socrates questions the impact of writing on human memory and intelligence. He argues that writing weakens the mind by allowing people to rely on external aids instead of their internal memory. To explain this, Socrates tells a story about two Egyptian gods, Theuth and Thamus, debating whether writing should be introduced to society. Theuth believes writing will improve wisdom and memory, while Thamus warns that it will lead to forgetfulness, as people will stop using their minds and instead rely on written records. Thamus feared that people would seem knowledgeable but actually know very little. Today, with the rise of computers, and digital data, these concerns seem more relevant than ever. As soon as people could record their thoughts externally, they began to depend less on their memory. Digital technology allows us to store and search for information and ideas, but it also encourages us to rely on these external sources instead of developing our internal cognitive abilities and emotional connections. E-books, digital encyclopedias, and search engines have taken over much of the brain's work, making us dependent on these memory substitutes. With the generative AI, this dependency has intensified. With instant access to newly generated information via large language models, people engage in less deep thinking than ever before. While you have access to vast knowledge, your ability to remember and process it meaningfully has weakened. These external tools simplify your thinking, making it shallow and superficial. Research¹¹ has shown that when people know information is easily accessible, they tend to focus on where to find it rather than understanding the content itself. While these tools may free up mental space for higher-level thinking, they also reduce the brain's capacity for memory and intellectual effort. The reliance on technology has created a technology of forgetfulness, where the mind no longer works the way it once did. Using these mental prosthetics, you are not creating novelty and not even searching for information by yourself. As a result, the more complex the external tools and sources of knowledge production become, the more the internal cognitive abilities diminish. People hear and read more information than ever, but without engaging deeply, they risk becoming shallow thinkers¹². Socrates warned that external cognitive aids—whether writing, books, or computers—cannot replace the intellectual and emotional strength of the human brain. The more complex the culture and language become

¹¹ Sparrow, B., Liu, J. and Wegner, D.M. (2011). Google Effects on Memory: Cognitive Consequences of Having Information at Our Fingertips. *Science*, [online] 333(6043), pp.776–778. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1207745>.

¹² Carr, N. (2010). *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our brains*. S.L.: W W Norton.

through these technologies, the more human thoughts are reduced to simplistic and shallow ideas. Instead of enhancing our intelligence, climbing the Tower of Babel leaves us with a mind that is reliant, weakened, and unable to fully engage in deep or original thinking. Throughout history, every major communication technology—whether it's writing, the printing press, the telephone, television, the internet, or artificial intelligence—has promised to advance human intelligence and collective organization. Yet rather than leading to enlightenment, these innovations often trigger cycles of intellectual and linguistic decline. Much like the story of the Tower of Babel, where humanity's ambition to reach divine knowledge led to confusion and disarray, each new technology has a similar effect. Instead of elevating human thought, it fosters fragmentation, shallow understanding, and social disorder. However, this intellectual decline may serve as a protective mechanism. If every new technology resulted in perfect understanding and organization, the concentration of power could easily spiral into danger. The fragmentation and distraction created by each technological leap prevent unchecked control and domination, offering a safeguard against the potential for self-destruction. Instead of pushing humanity toward dangerous levels of collective intelligence and power, this decay keeps ambitions in check, preserving a delicate balance between progress and safety. The Babel myth and the ladder metaphor expose the idea of the confusion of language. Wittgenstein's idea of linguistic confusion is closely tied to his concept of "private language," which argues that language is only meaningful when shared by a group and becomes meaningless when used by an individual in isolation. But this is true in the sense that it is a small group of closely related people and that the individual can be isolated when he feels alienated in a big society. Language functions as an instrument that depends on social interaction for trust and support. Without a shared context, language can easily lead to confusion, miscommunication, and a breakdown in communities. When language is abstracted from the social framework that gives it meaning, it risks becoming fragmented and unclear, underscoring the importance of collective use in avoiding confusion. Rather than being something sacred or extraordinary, language is simply a tool, and every person, family, or group of friends could invent their tool. The simple communication with "private language" that binds us to those closest—our family, siblings, and friends—is more than enough to sustain meaningful relationships. Do we truly need anything more? Isn't a life rooted in these intimate connections sufficient? Or is a common life together no longer enough? Yet, people constantly seek more, driven by the complexity of our language. Like climbing the Tower of Babel in pursuit of reaching God. Going up the ladder of technology and civilization our increasingly intricate words create confusion, isolation, and conflict. The higher people climb in search of meaning, the further they drift from the simple truths they once knew. Complex human communication creates problems that simple language does not. Instead of climbing upward toward unattainable heights, the solution is to descend the ladder of the Tower of Babel.

Evil Talk, Simple Talk

In his book "Crazy Talk, Stupid Talk: How We Defeat Ourselves by the Way We Talk and What to Do About It"¹³, Neil Postman examines how language can often be harmful and even destructive. He divides harmful speech into two categories: "stupid talk," which results

¹³ Postman, N. (1978). Crazy Talk, stupid talk..

from careless mistakes and has limited, often immediate negative effects, and "crazy talk," which is more dangerous. Crazy talk is persuasive and semantically sound but rooted in irrational or misleading assumptions, often promoting destructive ideas that distort reality. Postman argues that about half of all communication falls into these harmful categories, undermining real understanding and fostering conflict. Crazy talk, in particular, is insidious because it creates simplistic, absolutist narratives—like framing complex relationships as oppressor and oppressed—that disregard the nuance of human experience. It traps people in its limited logic, making it difficult to question or escape. In this way, language can be a powerful tool of deception and manipulation, promoting division and irrational thinking. Ultimately, Postman suggests that much of the harm done by language is not just accidental but systemic, as crazy talk redefines the norms of communication, spreading destructive ideas that can have wide-reaching consequences. By recognizing and resisting such talk, people can protect themselves from being misled or manipulated. But what about "Evil language"? Language becomes truly evil when it is used to justify, defend, or normalize acts of violence, oppression, and cruelty, as often seen in political rhetoric and propaganda. Politicians, propagandists, and other influencers can manipulate language to rationalize atrocities like torture and killing, cloaking these actions in terms that make them seem necessary or even virtuous. By reframing violence as "defense" or "protection," and labeling enemies as "threats" or "subhuman," such rhetoric dehumanizes victims and numbs the public to moral consequences. This form of evil language persuades people to accept or participate in inhumane actions by twisting ethical frameworks. When leaders speak of "collateral damage" instead of civilian deaths or refer to torture as "enhanced interrogation," they are not just communicating—they are shaping a moral environment in which violence is acceptable. Such language works to diminish critical thinking and desensitize people to the true impact of their actions, turning language into a tool for evil. The danger lies in how easily this manipulative speech can influence collective consciousness, making it seem as if there are no alternatives to violence and destruction. It encourages complicity, allowing individuals to participate in or tolerate atrocities without fully confronting the ethical cost. In this way, language, when used for evil purposes, can have far-reaching and devastating effects on society. In conclusion, the author highlights how Habermas's concept of systematically distorted communication applies to scholarship itself. Scholars often use theories like Habermas's as unquestioned explanatory tools without subjecting them to critique or refinement. This practice can lead to intellectual stagnation, where theories are treated as sacred rather than evolving frameworks. By avoiding reflexive critique, scholars fall into a form of intellectual bondage, where disciplinary norms dominate thinking. Evil speech is a powerful tool used to distort reality and manipulate moral perception. It takes acts of cruelty and destruction and frames them as necessary or even virtuous, stripping away the natural feelings of guilt and shame that would typically arise from such actions. By presenting violence as a duty or higher cause, this kind of language desensitizes individuals, allowing them to partake in atrocities without questioning their morality. This language often emphasizes purity or honor in the execution of evil, creating a false sense of righteousness. It dehumanizes victims and reframes destruction as a protective measure or a moral imperative. Through this manipulation, evil speech not only absolves individuals of personal responsibility but also reshapes their internal moral compass, allowing them to act in ways that would otherwise be unconscionable. The effects of such speech are profound: it numbs empathy, rationalizes cruelty, and fosters a collective sense of justification for even the most inhumane actions. By removing the moral

weight of decisions, evil speech enables cycles of violence and oppression to continue unchecked, shielded by the belief that the actions taken are necessary and right. So, what is the opposite of evil talk and systematically distorted communication? What is language good for other than as a utility tool? What is the best use of language? According to Jürgen Habermas¹⁴, it is what he calls the "ideal speech situation". In this concept, communication is free from manipulation, coercion, or distortion, allowing participants to engage in open, honest dialogue where the only force is the strength of the better argument. In an ideal speech situation, several conditions must be met such as equality of participation, absence of coercion, truthfulness, and rational discourse. All participants must have equal opportunities to speak, question, and express their views. No one should be pressured or manipulated into agreement; participants must be free to express their genuine opinions. Each speaker is assumed to be sincere, aiming to contribute to mutual understanding rather than personal gain or deception. The discussion is oriented toward reaching consensus through logical reasoning and critical reflection, rather than through emotional appeals or rhetorical manipulation. This ideal closely resembles the idealized form of academic discussion, where individuals engage in reasoned debate, evaluate evidence, and strive for mutual understanding without distortion from external pressures like power dynamics, hidden agendas, or personal interests. For Habermas, such communication aims at consensus based on the force of better arguments, making it a form of rational discourse that promotes social and political change through enlightenment and understanding, free from systematic distortions. The concept of an "ideal speech situation" aligns with the idea that the ultimate power of language lies in simple, meaningful conversations with those close to us. In these moments, communication is free from manipulation and power dynamics, allowing for genuine understanding. Such conversations reflect the deepest purpose of language—creating harmony and connection, where words flow as music and mutuality is the goal. These intimate exchanges are more significant than formal or institutional dialogues, which often serve external agendas. Instead, the beauty of simple talk lies in fostering connection and understanding, making it the ultimate form of communication, far more important than the official goals of society or institutions. The ultimate beauty and power of language might be found in the simplicity of meaningful conversations with those close to us. According to Bulgarian writer Tsvetan Stoyanov these "nice conversations"¹⁵ are more than just passing time; they are akin to art. They involve rhythm, melody, and a deep connection, requiring harmony between two people. In these moments, words become unnecessary as understanding flows effortlessly, creating a shared experience where thoughts move together. The true magic lies in the feeling of being completely understood, of sharing thoughts and feelings in perfect unison, like a concert between two souls. Such conversations, though fleeting, leave lasting impressions. They might not be recorded like a poem or a sculpture, but their impact continues to shape and guide us long after the words are forgotten. These exchanges give us joy, closeness, and meaning, far beyond what we might initially realize. They have the power to break down barriers, heal wounds, and bring a sense of unity to a world that often feels fragmented. Through good conversations, we find a connection with others that fulfills a fundamental human need for closeness and understanding. In the end, nice conversations reveal that people seek each other not out of necessity, but because we naturally crave this sense of closeness. They remind

¹⁴ Habermas, J., 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Translated by T. McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press.

¹⁵ Tsvetan Stoyanov (1988). *Sŭchineniia v dva toma*. Sofia

us of the beauty in our relationships and encourage us to create more of these meaningful interactions. In their simplicity, they may be among the most valuable and fulfilling moments in life. Kurt Vonnegut highlights the importance of recognizing and appreciating simple moments of real connection with loved ones, rather than focusing on grand victories. “So when we were drinking lemonade under an apple tree in the summer, say, and talking lazily about this and that, almost buzzing like honeybees, Uncle Alex would suddenly interrupt the agreeable blather to exclaim, “If this isn’t nice, I don’t know what is.”¹⁶ His uncle Alex, a graduate of Harvard taught him to notice when things are going well—whether it’s talking with family or friends, or even sitting together in peaceful silence. These small, everyday moments are where true happiness often lies if you acknowledge their beauty, and remind yourself, “If simple talk isn’t nice, I don’t know what is.” It’s simple wisdom that calls to cherish the quiet joy found in genuine connection.

Down the Ladder of Babble

The ladder metaphor, used by both Mauthner and Wittgenstein, serves as a powerful representation of how the role of language is understood, though with different nuances. Should people climb the ladder using even more complex language in search of God, or go down the tower of useless words in search of their fellow man? Mauthner’s ladder analogy illustrates how language stores historical information. As one climbs a ladder, each new rung that is grasped pushes the lowest rung underground, symbolizing how previous stages of language are seemingly forgotten but still preserved within it. This process highlights the evolution of language, where old meanings are buried yet remain foundational to new developments. “I must destroy the language behind me and in front of me and within me from step to step, so I must smash every rung of the ladder by stepping on it.”¹⁷ Mauthner’s critique of language demands that each step of the ladder be destroyed once used, so that future climbers must rebuild and destroy it again as they ascend, constantly reshaping language. This also reflects the historical layers that language accumulates and retains, even as it evolves. Wittgenstein, influenced by Mauthner, adapted the ladder metaphor in his “Tractatus”, but with a more philosophical twist. He proposed that the propositions in his book are like rungs on a ladder that must be climbed to achieve understanding, but once this understanding is reached, the ladder (the propositions) should be discarded. This reflects Wittgenstein’s view that language can help people see the world correctly, but once that clarity is attained, the limitations of language are exposed, and it must be recognized as inadequate or senseless. In Wittgenstein’s words, “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” While both philosophers use the ladder to critique language, Mauthner focuses on the ongoing process of rebuilding and reinterpreting language, where historical layers are preserved beneath the surface. In contrast, Wittgenstein gives the ladder a more mystical and therapeutic meaning, using it to show how language helps us grasp understanding but must eventually be transcended. Both philosophers highlight the limitations of language in helping us transcend basic understanding. As Mauthner poignantly suggests, “Men learned to speak in order to understand one another. Cultural languages have lost the ability to help men advance beyond the most rudimentary level and attain understanding. It seems that the time has come to learn to be silent once again¹⁸.” This signals a deeper critique:

¹⁶ Vonnegut, K. (2007). *A Man Without a Country*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

¹⁷ Mauthner, F. (2014). *Beiträge Zu Einer Kritik Der Sprache*. Nabu Press.

¹⁸ Mauthner, F. (2014). *Beiträge Zu Einer Kritik Der Sprache*. Nabu Press.

that language, which was once a tool for connection, has now become a barrier to higher comprehension. In light of this, perhaps, as Mauthner suggests, the time has come "to learn to be silent once again." This silence, advocated by both Mauthner and Wittgenstein, reflects the ultimate realization of the limits of language and the need to transcend it in pursuit of true understanding. The critique of language, prominent in late 19th and early 20th-century philosophy, revolves around recognizing the limits of language in conveying true meaning. Philosophers questioned the ability of words to express complex, existential, or mystical truths, and often pointed to silence as a paradoxical yet essential alternative. Mauthner's work critically examined the limitations of language, ultimately denying its epistemological reliability. He argued that language often distorts reality, and that true understanding requires a skeptical approach, recognizing language's inability to provide certainty or absolute truth. For him, the silence was a skeptical response to the failures of language, representing a retreat from the ideals and superstitions language attempts to convey. Wittgenstein, influenced by this tradition but with a different motivation, also explored the boundaries of language. He proposed that certain aspects of human experience—such as ethics, aesthetics, and the mystical—are beyond the scope of words. In his *"Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus"*, he famously argued that "there are things that cannot be put into words," suggesting that the most important truths reveal themselves through intuition and feeling rather than linguistic explanation. Wittgenstein saw the "solution of the problem of life" not in language, but in the dissolution of the problem itself, suggesting that silence holds the key to understanding what words cannot capture. Both thinkers underscore the potential harms and dangers of relying too heavily on language. When misused, language can obscure meaning and lead to confusion or false understanding. Silence, in contrast, provides a way to transcend these limits, offering space for deeper reflection and the recognition of truths that lie beyond verbal articulation. In a world where language is often overused or misused, the embrace of silence emerges as a necessary counterbalance, guiding us toward greater clarity and understanding. By going down the ladder, one abandons the quest for domination and transcendence through language, and instead, finds himself back among those who matter most. Descending the tower of abstract language means that all the complex language with its problems and abstraction is forgotten. Most of the books in the dusty bookcases in university faculties around the world will be forgotten and this is their fate. *Thamus*, the Egyptian god, is right after all. Writing is forgetting. Writing a book is a way to externalize your memories, feelings, worries, fears, etc. They are not your problem anymore and you can go on free from the bygone. Writing is a cathartic activity. To generate your story structure with all the perceived information and to let it go. To get rid of all ideologies, theories, propaganda, buzzwords, slogans, etc. Writing is a way to free yourself from language. To find peace with the past and to be noble and grateful about life. Grasp the unbearable lightness of language. Going down the ladder of Babble means leaving the realm of empty words and overcomplicated ideas and returning to the simplicity of genuine human connection. Simple and direct communication—rooted in love, trust, and closeness—devoid of the entanglements of elaborate language. Ultimately, the only true solution is silence, where you can finally be content with the others, free from the burdens of language, and grounded in the peace that comes from simply being together. Heaven is also other people.

Tao Te Ching, verse 16

“Forget about knowledge and wisdom,
 and people will be a hundred times better off.
 Throw away charity and righteousness,
 and people will return to brotherly love.
 Throw away profit and greed,
 and there won’t be any thieves.
 These three are superficial and aren’t enough
 to keep us at the center of the circle,
 so we must also: Embrace simplicity.
 Put others first. Desire little.”

“There's an old saying in Tennessee —
 I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee —
 that says, fool me once, shame on —
 shame on you. Fool me —
 you can't get fooled again.”
 — George W. Bush

1. Dark side of language**First weapon drawn in conflict**

What is language? One of the many definitions according to Google is: “Language is the glue that holds people together. It is the foundation of civilization. Language is the first weapon drawn in the conflict.” It is a great definition, but it turns out it is a part of a movie script. At the beginning of the movie “Arrival”, physicist Dr. Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner) recites the opening lines from a linguistics text written by Prof. Louise Banks (Amy Adams). “Language is the first weapon drawn in a conflict” he reads. That line highlights the film's core themes of communication and conflict. As the story unfolds, it becomes evident that a culture's formulation, visual representation, and use of language often reflect its identity, including its darker aspects, which may not always be immediately apparent. A real constructive force for building larger and larger communities, human language is a tool for preserving values and traditions for millennia. However, language also has a dark side, and it is used for dissent, division, and miscommunication in the same large communities. Like in the myth of Babel, language is responsible for building the tower and for its destruction. It is a dangerous time when one language is used by big groups of people. The nature of human communities ultimately defines the language they use, not vice versa. In the beginning was the singing ape, not the word. People precede language. This makes it very difficult to understand because of the paradox of subjectivity. The language as a subject for the world is one thing, while the language as an object in the world is something else. Understandably, people tend to idealize language and its use for community building and human progress. It is seen as something inherently good that needs admiration rather than development. At the same time, there is a systemic bias about language as a destructive force. One thing is true, language can be a weapon. Every war starts with propaganda. The evil use of language as a tool simply shows the

negative side of human nature. So how to avoid this inherent human bias about language? Maybe just as in the movie “Arrival” only an extraterrestrial or nonhuman view of the matter will shine a light on this dark side. It is said that there are no weapons stronger than words. They hit faster than a bullet, and never fail to hit the heart. Even without maleficence language can be harmful to people who use it. It is a dangerous weapon for survival, but exactly like fire can also bring damage. The dark side of language is not only in the form of verbal abuse but also psychological harm. Language plays a crucial role in some psychosis and sometimes a mental disorder¹⁹ is a linguistic experience. Apart from malevolent speech, disorganized language is the path to dangerous delusions, utter stupidity, and madness. Often people can become obsessed by the infinite possibilities of signification of language and use it to reach the darkest places of human consciousness. This dangerous nature of language usually is reached in the rich and complex languages of highly developed civilizations. It is usually a sign of decadence in the whole culture. It shows the coming collapse of values and meaning.

Primum non nocere

The study of Miscommunication explores how intentional efforts, historical shifts, and technological advancements contribute to the erosion of linguistic richness, threatening the very essence of human expression with amplifying destructive effects of mass communication and human civilization itself. However, the concept of “planned obsolescence” presupposes some intention and design in the forces for destruction as a form of renewal. In this case, the non-maleficence principle of “first, do no harm” (*Primum non nocere*) cannot be used for the language even when it is investigated as a source of detriment. This principle is useless when investigating human nature. Language is a tool created and used by people, so it reflects their characters. It was always used in harmful ways even in small groups, families, and tribes. But since it became an instrument for uniting tribes in nations the harmful effects on individuals and small groups increased. Language strengthens people's sense of connection to their culture, enhancing their mental well-being and fostering greater social cohesion. In large countries, the official language is much more than the sum of its dialects. The sense of domination, greatness, and power became the main goal of a national language. The official language was created to be ambiguous, and words can be easily obfuscated. Words stand in for concepts that unite people, but they also very easily make people stand apart from each other. The basic uses of language as a societal tool are for the expression of ideas, transportation of information, and creation of ideological communities. When the language becomes obsolete and loses its shared meaning it's time for renewal. The fastest way for societal change is to change the names of the ideology and institutions. The new language saves a lot of energy and effort to change the real conditions of life and power connections instead of only changing the names. The goal of this language is to build communities of trust and common beliefs, not to deal with problems in reality. Complex languages create purely linguistic and philosophical problems just to divert attention from the status quo. Language as a power tool has a deeply conservative nature. The process of communication is not merely the transportation of words but a transformation of individuals into virtual collectives. This is how nations are created, usually using some creation myth and historical storyline. Language as a tool for mass communication is also a tool for control and domination of big groups of people. Language is the stuff that empires are made of.

¹⁹ Cardella, V. and Gangemi, A. (2021). *Psychopathology and Philosophy of Mind*. Routledge.

Empires throughout history have relied on language to establish control, unify diverse populations, and propagate ideologies. It is through language that laws are written, histories are recorded, and identities are forged. Just as dreams are constructed from fleeting thoughts and symbols, empires are built and sustained through the words and narratives that define them. Language then, becomes the foundation of these grand structures, the medium through which they persist in history and memory. It shapes not only the present but also how future generations will remember them. Language is used to manufacture consent or dissent when needed, order, or disorder in the name of preservation of the status quo. When the tipping point for societal renewal is reached, political language is first to change. The political economy of complex languages follows cycles of systematically distorted communication or miscommunication. This heavy use of language as a power tool leads to the decay of complex languages, systematic distortion of communication, and latent dysfunctions of social structures. In the downfall of empires, the failure of language mirrors a broader failure of thought and leadership.

A dialect with an army

The phrase "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy" humorously underscores the arbitrary distinction between a dialect and a language, suggesting that the classification is often influenced by political and social power rather than linguistic differences. This witty observation, commonly associated with sociolinguist and Yiddish scholar Max Weinreich, was popularized after he heard it from an audience member during a lecture series in the 1940s. Weinreich noted how the speaker used this quip to highlight the marginalized status of Yiddish, illustrating how the perception of a language's legitimacy often depends more on political backing than on inherent linguistic qualities. A language is a dialect with an army because the political role of language is to establish dominance and identity within nations and empires. It reflects how state power—through military and political force—often determines whether a dialect becomes recognized as a legitimate "language" or is marginalized. The distinction is not solely linguistic but is shaped by the social and political forces that grant authority and status to certain languages over others. This idea aligns with how language extinction occurs through economic, political, and cultural forces that systematically erode languages, often favoring those tied to dominant global powers. For example, during the spread of empires or colonial regimes, dominant languages often supplanted local dialects. Languages tied to less powerful communities are sidelined or rendered obsolete to promote those that align with national or imperial agendas. In modern times, language policies are instrumental in shaping national identities, often leading to the deliberate marginalization of minority languages. Governments may promote a unified national language to strengthen national cohesion, but this often comes at the cost of erasing alternative linguistic forms. When a dialect dies, it signifies the loss of a unique perspective on life. It's not merely a disappearance of words, but the erasure of an entire cultural framework—a specific way of perceiving, interacting with, and interpreting the world. Each dialect carries with it distinct knowledge, values, and experiences, and when it vanishes, so does the rich, nuanced understanding of the small world it represents. This is also the case with minority languages which are systematically neglected, rendering them irrelevant in the broader socio-political landscape. Languages without an army and a navy are doomed to marginalization. Furthermore, digital technologies and globalization accelerate this process. In the digital age, certain languages dominate online platforms, while others struggle to adapt, furthering the rapid decline of less dominant languages. This reflects how linguistic imperialism

continues in a new form, where the use of global languages in technology and international trade renders others obsolete. In essence, the political role of language is intertwined with the dynamics of power. Those in power shape linguistic evolution, ensuring that certain languages rise to dominance while others fade away, mirroring how political control extends even into the realm of communication and identity. This loss of linguistic diversity mirrors how political and economic forces shape communication, consolidating power through the dominance of certain languages. In turn, this leads to a homogenization of thought, where the diversity of ideas, expressions, and cultural nuances are oversimplified or flattened. The long-term consequences of this linguistic imperialism often contribute to the fragmentation and decline of empires as they lose touch with the diverse cultures and knowledge systems within their territories.

Dunbar Number

The weakening of intellectual standards and the embrace of superficiality signal the beginning of a larger collapse, as the empire loses the ability to communicate effectively, solve problems, and maintain coherence. Thus, the deterioration of language serves as an early warning of an impending decline. One of the first signs is the loss of the meaning behind the word "we," caused by growing diversity, dissent, and inequality. When the collective sense of "we" — the shared identity and unity that binds a society together — begins to erode social cohesion. Without a shared "we," the language becomes hollow, and the shared vision that once sustained starts to fade. This is a critical early sign of impending instability, as the nation loses the glue that once held it together. People need the concept of "we" to understand and define our identity as "me." Our sense of self is shaped by belonging to a group that thinks like us, shares our worldview, and uses language in similar ways. "We" provides the context within which "me" can exist, offering a shared framework of meaning and language. Through this collective identity, people find a deeper understanding of themselves, as our individual experiences are connected to the larger group's understanding of the world. The most important question in any language is, "Who are 'we'?" In 1975 Muhammad Ali gave a talk to a group of students who asked to give them a poem. Ali replied "Me, We²⁰," or "Me? Wheel!!" and this couplet competes for the title of the shortest poem ever written in the English language. The first version is about community and the second is about egotism. One of the shortest poems in English can hold the secret of communication, a freewheeling celebration of the self or altruist desire for togetherness. These incongruous interpretations show that the ultimate limitation of language is the ego of the person who speaks. Who speaks, why, and to whom? The language was just a tool that initially created a coalition between a few people. After thousands of years, language arguably helped the human population to grow to billions. But mass communication changed the use of language forever. The Dunbar Number, a concept proposed by British anthropologist Robin Dunbar, suggests humans can maintain meaningful relationships with up to 150 people. Language, in this view, originated as a tool for managing increasingly complex social networks, allowing humans to live in larger groups while maintaining the social bonds necessary for survival and cooperation. This connection between language and social structure underscores the idea that language is not just a means of communication but a vital mechanism for social cohesion and group identity. In these larger groups, where individuals lack personal

²⁰ Gupta, S.D. (2022). Me We by Muhammad Ali. [online] Poem Analysis. Available at: <https://poemanalysis.com/muhammad-ali/me-we/>.

bonds, it's easier for leaders or institutions to use language to influence, manipulate, and control the collective. Narratives can be shaped to create divisions or foster unity, often by manufacturing common enemies or ideological identities. Without the grounding of personal relationships, individuals in large groups are more likely to align with these constructed identities, making them easier to lead, divide, or control. If the capacity for language and the cognitive load of maintaining about 150 relationships are interconnected as human groups grow, language becomes essential for tracking relationships, maintaining group cohesion, and transmitting cultural knowledge. In larger groups, gossip and storytelling also emerged as ways to build trust, form alliances, and ensure cooperation without direct physical interaction. When personal connections are weakened, larger groups are more susceptible to manipulation and control. In smaller, tightly-knit tribes, communication is direct, and trust is built through personal interactions. However, when groups exceed this limit, language becomes the primary tool for cohesion, and abstract concepts like "us" and "them" take over. When there is a loss of group and personal identity, one of the easiest and most dangerous ways to renew a sense of collective self-concept is by fabricating an enemy—"us" versus "them." This tactic taps into an ancient principle: "divide and rule." By manufacturing dissent and fostering division, those in power can create different ideological identities that pit groups against each other, often igniting internal conflict and even "cold civil wars" within a nation. This strategy capitalizes on the human tendency to bond more strongly when faced with a common adversary, artificially strengthening the "we" by contrasting it against a perceived "them." It can fracture society along ideological, ethnic, or social lines, fueling hostility and undermining unity. While this linguistic strategy of hostility propaganda may temporarily restore a sense of collective belonging, it does so at the cost of deeper division and instability, eroding the very fabric of the nation in the long term. To revitalize the language people must restart speaking of "We", but in a small group of people who trust each other. Today to speak personally to only one person looks like a waste of language. Social media gives people the power to speak "Urbi et Orbi" (to the city and the world), almost as a papal address. But the purpose of any human language still is to create an emotional bond between at least two people. Me...we! In Vonnegut's words: "Write to please just one person. If you open a window and make love to the world, so to speak, your story will get pneumonia."²¹ Only by speaking and listening together, we can retell the narrative of language's decline, transforming it into a tale of renewal, unity, consent, and trust.

Closing Questions:

As we navigate the labyrinth of linguistic decay and deliberate manipulation, can we, the architects of language, descend and desert the orchestrated chaos of the Tower of Babble and start a new building? Not a castle or tower but a simple home of language. One not of division but of unity, one where sincerity, silence, and mindfulness weave a tapestry of understanding? Will you join the endeavor to revitalize the language, or will you succumb to the planned obsolescence that threatens to dismantle the very essence of our shared humanity?

²¹ Vonnegut, K. (1999). *Bagombo snuff box : uncollected short fiction*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Conspiracy of ambiguity

The idea of a "conspiracy of speech" revolves around the intentional manipulation or coordination of language to achieve certain goals, often hidden from the general public. In such a context, communication between individuals or groups can be designed to obscure true intentions, protect sensitive information, or manipulate public perception without directly lying. Instead, this type of speech relies on indirect, coded, or vague language that allows participants to maintain plausible deniability while still conveying their underlying message. The "conspiracy of speech" thus reflects a dynamic where miscommunication is not accidental but intentional, crafted to shield the speaker from accountability or to manipulate the narrative. This deliberate distortion of language allows for subtle influence over public discourse while maintaining an appearance of neutrality or openness. In such instances, communication becomes a tool not for transparency but for control, ensuring that only those who are "in the know" can truly understand the message. Much like ambiguity, this form of speech can serve a protective function in situations where direct expression is dangerous, socially risky, or politically sensitive. By using language in this way, speakers can maintain plausible deniability, convey messages to in-groups, or influence perception without overtly stating their intentions. In this sense, a conspiracy of speech would be a natural, evolved mechanism within communication, allowing for subtlety and nuance, much like the way ambiguity allows speakers to adapt language to different contexts efficiently. This perspective suggests that both ambiguity and conspiracy of speech arise from the same fundamental drive in language: to enable flexible, efficient, and socially strategic communication. Both can function as tools for navigating the complexities of human relationships, where directness may not always be the most effective or safest approach. In this light, communication can be seen not just as a process of exchanging clear information, but also as a means of managing power, influence, and social dynamics. If we look at "conspiracy of speech" through the lens of its Latin root "conspirare", meaning "to breathe together," it evokes a sense of unity and trust among people. All true communicators must be conspirators if their goal is not only the exchange of information but also relationships with others. This perspective highlights how speech functions more effectively and meaningfully between people who share a close bond or mutual trust. In such cases, communication becomes more fluid, nuanced, and instinctive—almost like a shared breath, where understanding comes from a deeper connection rather than an explicit explanation. When people "breathe together" in speech, they don't just exchange words; they engage in a shared experience where subtle cues, tones, and unspoken meanings flow more easily. This close communication enhances understanding because the speakers are attuned to each other's intentions, emotions, and context. Such a "conspiracy" is not about hiding or deceiving but about cultivating a space where language becomes more intimate and effective. In relationships where trust is strong, communication can transcend the literal meaning of words, allowing for richer, more efficient exchanges. Here, language serves as a bridge that reinforces togetherness, creating a sense of mutual understanding that is harder to achieve in more distant or formal interactions.

Ambiguity in language

What is the communicative function of ambiguity in language?²² MIT cognitive scientists have revisited the longstanding debate on the role of ambiguity in language, offering a fresh perspective that challenges the traditional view of ambiguity as a flaw in communication. Contrary to the belief that language should be optimized for clarity, where each word has a single, distinct meaning, the researchers propose that ambiguity actually enhances communication. By allowing common, short words to carry multiple meanings, language enables speakers to convey information more economically, relying on the listener's ability to use contextual clues to discern the intended meaning. Of course, miscommunication is a possibility and is part of the process. The efficacy of the language game for certain players depends on their abilities, experience, and attention to detail. If ambiguity is inherent to human language, then what is the purpose of systematically distorted communication? This suggests that miscommunication is not a flaw but a feature of language that has evolved to maximize communicative efficiency. For example, in times of social decay and corruption of power using the vagueness and obscurity of words can be beneficial. On the other hand, doublespeak is often used in politics. The interplay between the sender's need for brevity and the receiver's ability to infer meaning from context creates a system where ambiguity becomes advantageous, streamlining communication by reusing familiar linguistic forms in varied contexts. It underscores the necessity of context in any system dealing with human communication, highlighting the complexity and efficiency of our linguistic capabilities. A perfectly efficient language system, in theory, would eliminate ambiguity, making meaning straightforward to infer without contextual clues. However, the fact that ambiguity is widespread suggests that it might serve an important function. Other than some uses for manipulation, ambiguity enables the reuse of simple, frequent linguistic elements, which are easier to produce and understand. When context provides sufficient information, unambiguous language can become redundant, leading to inefficiency. Thus, an optimal communication system leverages ambiguity, using context to disambiguate meaning without overburdening the listener. These benefits suggest that ambiguity is a natural outcome in any system striving for communicative and cognitive efficiency. That also hints that language tends to make complex and abstract constructions obsolete and to rely on the importance of the concrete situation for understanding. According to the context doublespeak and irony can be the best communication strategy even masked as miscommunication.

Doublespeak

In "The Greeks and Greek Civilization"²³, Jacob Burckhardt presents a view of ancient Greek culture that contrasts sharply with its idealized image as a cradle of truth and wisdom. Burckhardt argues that Greek society was deeply immersed in deception and sophism. Greeks not only tolerated but often celebrated cunning and fake rhetoric, sometimes placing these above honesty and straightforwardness. As actors, they excelled in the art of presentation and manipulation, both in public and private life. This idea of life as theater suggests that the Greeks were more concerned with appearance and the persuasive power of language than with truth itself. This cultural tendency is reflected in their politics, and especially democracy where

²² Piantadosi, S.T., Tily, H. and Gibson, E. (2012). The communicative function of ambiguity in language. *Cognition*, 122(3), pp.280–291. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2011.10.004>.

²³ Burckhardt, J., Murray, O. and Stern, S. (1999). *The Greeks and Greek civilization*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

rhetoric and oratory were prized, and in their literature and philosophy, which often explored themes of duplicity and the ambiguity of human nature. Even the gods in Greek mythology, are depicted as deceitful and capricious, reflecting the values of the people who worshiped them. This critical perspective challenges the conventional view of the Greeks as paragons of philosophical virtue, suggesting moral ambiguity. Burckhardt's work invites readers to reconsider the foundations of Western culture, acknowledging the darker aspects of the Greek language as a form of doublespeak. Doublespeak represents a form of linguistic subterfuge, where language is deliberately twisted to obscure, distort, or even invert the meaning of words. This manipulation often manifests as euphemisms, but at its core, doublespeak exploits the inherent ambiguity of complex language. Thus, political language turns it into a tool for deceit and abstraction, veiling the truth in layers of palatable falsehoods. The term "doublespeak" draws inspiration from George Orwell's dystopian vision in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where language is wielded as a weapon of control. Though Orwell didn't coin the term, his concepts of "doublethink" and "Newspeak" encapsulate the essence of doublespeak—language designed not to clarify, but to confuse, to defend the indefensible, and to render lies indistinguishable from truth. At the same time, doublespeak is used daily in public communication even by people who quote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and warn about brainwashing, propaganda, and fake news. This linguistic sleight of hand is most commonly associated with political discourse, where it becomes a mechanism for shaping reality according to ideological agendas. Through doublespeak, the language of power subtly shifts public perception, making the unacceptable appear reasonable and the reprehensible seem justified. It is a form of communication that thrives on ambiguity, where words are stripped of their concrete meanings and repurposed to serve the whims of those in authority. William D. Lutz's book "Doublespeak" (1989) delves into the manipulation of language used to obscure, mislead, or deceive. Lutz explores how "doublespeak"—a term for language that deliberately distorts meaning—allows those in power, especially in politics and business, to control narratives and evade responsibility. Various forms of doublespeak as euphemisms, jargon, bureaucratese, and inflated language, show how these techniques are used to manipulate perception and downplay negative outcomes. Doublespeak undermines clear communication, often making it harder for the public to hold institutions accountable. Beyond politics, doublespeak infiltrates other realms, such as advertising, where it cloaks commercial motives in seemingly benign language, and social media, where users employ coded language to evade censorship. In each case, the aim is the same: to manipulate, to obscure, and to lead the audience away from a clear understanding of reality. The power of doublespeak lies in its capacity to erode the very foundation of honest communication outside a small group of trusted people. By exploiting the ambiguity of language, it creates a landscape where truth is elusive, and reality is perpetually reshaped by those who control the narrative. In this way, doublespeak is not just a tool of deception but a method of constructing alternate realities—utopias or dystopias—where the line between fact and fiction blurs, and language becomes both a weapon and a shield in the ongoing battle for control over truth. Doublespeak serves as a reminder of the power of language to both enlighten and deceive. It underscores the need for vigilance in our use of words, for in the complexity of language lies the potential not only for profound truth but also for profound deceit. Edward S. Herman meticulously dissects the insidious mechanisms of doublespeak and doublethink in modern society, offering a compelling analysis in his book "Beyond Hypocrisy: Decoding the News in an Age of

Propaganda²⁴". Herman posits that the crux of doublespeak lies not just in the act of lying, but in the systemic ability to lie with impunity. Whether these lies are crafted consciously or stem from self-deception, the hallmark of doublespeak is its selective curation of facts—highlighting those that serve a specific agenda while discarding those that do not align with the desired narrative. Orwellian use of language is pervasive in political communication with layers of propaganda that saturate media and government discourse. With the use of popular buzzwords and political jargon, language is weaponized to obscure truth, manipulate public perception, and sustain power structures. Arguably today words are increasingly used to deceive rather than to inform and the doublespeak permeates our daily lives, where we all act as conspirators. Welcome to the new era where systematic miscommunication, propaganda, and deception are normalized and accepted by society at large. In this new context, the public, along with political leaders, journalists, public relations professionals, and propagandists, actively participate in or tolerate the “conspiracy of speech” as part of everyday discourse. Of course, this acceptance erodes public trust and allows for manipulation on a broad scale, but it looks like it is an inherent part of mass communication. The media's role is to amplify government and corporate propaganda and to filter news through ideological and economic interests. With social media, the audience becomes an active agent in obscuring the objective reflection of truth. This leads to a situation where lies and half-truths become ingrained in the public consciousness, as both the institutions that produce these narratives and the public that consumes them accept miscommunication as the norm. Media discourse is far from challenging power, and often works to reinforce dominant narratives, contributing to a cycle of misinformation that is difficult to break. Again, the ruling words are the words of the ruling parties. The normalization of deception has become a key feature of modern political and social life, making it redundant for people to discern truth from falsehood. One of the most notable features of the book “Beyond Hypocrisy” is its “Doublespeak Dictionary”, which provides a lexicon of U.S. government buzzwords and phrases that exemplify how language is manipulated to serve specific political agendas. It highlights the euphemisms, jargon, and misleading terminology that are often employed to soften the impact of harsh realities, justify questionable actions, or create a narrative that aligns with political objectives. The dictionary is: -Decoding euphemisms as, "Collateral damage"= Civilian casualties resulting from military action, "Enhanced interrogation"= Torture, and "Preemptive strike"= An unprovoked attack; -Revealing inversions of meaning, "Peacekeeping mission"= Military occupation or intervention, "Freedom fighters"= Rebel groups or insurgents that align with U.S. interests (while similar groups opposing U.S. interests might be labeled "terrorists"); -Highlighting Selective Use of Language, "Social welfare"= Often negatively portrayed as "handouts" when applied to programs for the poor, but similar aid to corporations might be referred to as "economic incentives" or "bailouts.", "Regime"= Typically used to describe governments that the U.S. opposes, while friendly governments, even if undemocratic, are described as "allies" or "partners." etc.

Political language

The idea that miscommunication and doublespeak may be essential to human civilization and political structures reflects a broader truth about how societies function on a large scale. In complex political and social systems, language often serves dual purposes: it communicates,

²⁴ Herman, E.S. (1992). *Beyond Hypocrisy*. Black Rose Books Ltd.

but it also masks, manipulates and obscures. This strategic use of language can help maintain order, manufacture dissent, and promote policies that might be difficult to justify if stated transparently. Historically, societies have relied on doublespeak or similar tactics as a way to navigate power dynamics. Governments, corporations, and institutions often employ doublespeak to obscure uncomfortable truths or sell certain ideas in a more palatable way. This tactic can prevent rebellion, smooth over controversies, and maintain the status quo, even when the public is aware of its deceptive nature. Miscommunication is intrinsically tied to power because it allows those in authority to manipulate language to control public perception, obscure uncomfortable truths, and maintain social order. It enables leaders and institutions to present policies or actions more acceptably, managing dissent or resistance by framing difficult realities in softer, less direct terms. Through doublespeak, power structures can shape narratives to their advantage, reinforcing their control while appearing transparent or benevolent. Even when people recognize that they are being fed lies, they may accept it because large political structures require a degree of order that direct and brutal truths might disrupt. As societies become larger and more complex, transparency can become destabilizing, and doublespeak serves as a buffer between the messy realities of governance and the idealized narratives that maintain public cohesion. In modern times, while the masses may no longer fully believe in the messages propagated through doublespeak, they might tolerate or even expect it. The prevalence of doublespeak highlights how deeply embedded these practices are in governance and media, as it has become an accepted tool for managing public perception. In this sense, doublespeak becomes an unfortunate but necessary part of large-scale societies, allowing governments to function smoothly by avoiding direct confrontation with difficult realities. This echoes the cynical view that doublespeak, though ethically problematic, may serve practical purposes in maintaining social order and preventing upheaval in political systems that need to manage the expectations and frustrations of millions of people. The paradox of miscommunication is that it is both a barrier to true communication and a necessary tool for large, complex societies. In small language communities like clans, families, or tribes, doublespeak is nearly impossible because communication is rooted in trust, directness, and mutual understanding. In these intimate settings, the consequences of deception are immediate and personal, making doublespeak unsustainable. However, as societies grow into large, bureaucratic nations, the need for doublespeak emerges. Governing millions of people with diverse needs, beliefs, and perspectives requires a more strategic use of language. Distorted communication allows political leaders and institutions to navigate complex issues without causing panic or dissent, offering sanitized or palatable versions of difficult truths. It is used to maintain order, justify policies, and shape public perception. In this way, doublespeak becomes a tool for governance, masking harsh realities while fostering a sense of stability. Yet, the paradox lies in the fact that while doublespeak may smooth over complexities, it also erodes trust. The public may become aware of the manipulation, creating cynicism and disengagement, as people recognize that language is being used to obscure rather than reveal. Even though the masses may no longer believe in doublespeak, they accept it as a part of the social contract that allows large-scale political structures to function. Thus, doublespeak is both essential for maintaining order in vast societies and corrosive to the very trust and transparency upon which those societies ideally depend. The idea that miscommunication leads to societal decay is rooted in how language shapes human interaction and power structures. Over time, as doublespeak erodes trust and clarity, it can undermine social cohesion, creating disillusionment and cynicism

within society. This decay becomes evident when people recognize that language is being manipulated to serve the interests of those in power, while the truth is obscured. Language, as a living system, has mechanisms to protect itself and society. When it becomes overly corrupted by doublespeak, there is often a natural push for renewal—a reset. This renewal can be seen as part of a "planned obsolescence of language" where outdated and manipulative forms of communication are eventually discarded, allowing for the emergence of clearer, more direct language. This cyclical renewal may act as a safeguard, protecting humans from the overreach of power and the environmental or social consequences of large, disconnected societies. In this way, language contains a kind of "kill switch" that activates when its misuse threatens to destabilize society or the environment. Humans, not naturally adapted to live in such vast, power-driven societies, may rely on these linguistic shifts to restore balance, ensuring that communication remains a force for connection and understanding, rather than manipulation and control.

*Toward a definition of Doublespeak*²⁵:

"Doublespeak is a language that pretends to communicate but really doesn't. It is a language that makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive or at least tolerable." – William Lutz

"Doublespeak is not a victimless crime; it assaults the very foundation of ethical communication."- George R. Bramer

"Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." – George Orwell

"I just want you to know that, when we talk about war, we're really talking about peace."
— George W. Bush

We will get fooled again

"The Planned Obsolescence of Language, Miscommunication Trilogy" is a journey through the intricate tapestry of language studies in three volumes. "The Conspiracy of Speech" tries to unravel the decay of complex languages, "The Entropy of Communication" to untangle the systematic distortion of communication, and "The Tower of Babble" to elucidate the latent dysfunctions of social structures. The Miscommunication Trilogy follows the long tradition of critique of language, but with a new twist, that misunderstanding is as fundamental to language as understanding. That's the doom and gloom merchant's view of language. No room for evolution or improvement in communication. Almost like the praise of folly of language. The potential for words to be misinterpreted is an inherent part of how communication works. Language doesn't guarantee precise meaning. The idea is that if misunderstanding is possible even once, it becomes a permanent aspect of how language functions. In the words of Rick Roderic: "Words can always misrefer. Our meanings could always go astray...And if it's

²⁵ Lutz, W. (1989). Beyond Nineteen Eighty-four.

possible to misrefer, if it's possible to misread, if it's possible to misunderstand, then it belongs to that structure I have called language to do those things. Because a possibility once is a necessity forever."²⁶ The concept of miscommunication highlights that language is not fixed; meaning can continuously shift, evolve, and be reinterpreted. Just as there can be no final commentary or interpretation of a text, communication remains open-ended, subject to endless flows of information and reinterpretation. Therefore, the capacity for misunderstanding is not a flaw but a necessary part of the endlessly evolving nature of language itself. The most difficult word to understand is still "we". What are the limits of "we"? But how many "we" are there, really? Billions globally, in continents and countries, or just millions squeezed into cities. Why is it so important for so many people to live in big cities? What role does language play in this urban sprawl? What about the population growth? Can it be that language and communication were more important than agriculture and animal breeding? That communication, not food, is responsible for population explosion? Language is what binds us, holds us to our word, and connects us in these tight, overcrowded spaces. But cities—they're efficient, energy-wise, sure. But good, common life together? Communication? Understanding? That's where it all falls apart. The utopia of Metropolis was designed for transhumans. Megacities are for people who use the fallen language of the Tower of Babel. The rewards of being a good person in a good company aren't enough. We've built these enormous, sprawling cities, but they're maxed out. The idea of living close among others has reached its limit. Cities, with their supposed advancements, work for the efficient, machine-like life of transhumans, but not for fostering genuine human closeness. Language in cities becomes a tool not for understanding but for survival, for selling the narrative of this "better life" that never quite materializes. Language gives meaning to the struggle for power and control. It is an abstract societal construct that can operate in a radical absence of humans. It's how we sell wars, market pointless jobs, and mask the reality of a disconnected, confused existence. The city might make sense in terms of energy efficiency, but for the soul of human communication, for the goodness we seek in life, it's a dead end. At the core, a big society is a fragile structure of words, laws, and promises. Break those words, and the whole thing collapses. The empty promises, the constant miscommunication—they're not just errors. They're the very tools of control that keep this system of power running, driving us further from the genuine life we once thought cities could provide. Words have become a means to an end, not a way to connect us. The collapse begins with the breakdown of language, and it's inevitable when we live in a world that has outgrown its capacity for true human goodness.

Ultima ratio regum

What is planned obsolescence? It's not just planning to fail, but rather designing systems with an expiration date, ensuring their eventual breakdown. It is a design of a failure. Everything great must have a built-in kill switch. Even human ideas. "Memento mori." We are scared of the atomic bomb, but all the bombs in the world were built using the language of power. Remember, "Language is the first weapon drawn in the conflict." The cannons of King Louis XIV of France were historically inscribed with the motto "Ultima ratio regum," which translates from Latin as "the last argument of kings". The phrase symbolizes the idea that when all other means of persuasion and diplomacy fail, war becomes the final tool or "last argument" of rulers. The word "argument" here suggests both the rhetorical sense of debate and logic, as well as a

²⁶ 307 derrida and the ends of man (1993) - Rick Roderick (2024) Rick Roderick -. Available at: <https://rickroderick.org/307-derrida-and-the-ends-of-man-1993/> (Accessed: 14 August 2024).

final physical force, in the form of cannons or warfare. In this context, words and logic become like weapons themselves, tools used to assert dominance or force a conclusion when all other means of negotiation fail. Just as kings use war as their last "argument" when diplomacy and persuasion are exhausted, words can similarly be deployed like guns, aiming to overpower the opposition. The phrase emphasizes that in both warfare and rhetoric, the goal is often not mutual understanding, but dominance. Language, like cannons, can be both persuasive and destructive, depending on how it is wielded. In political contexts, where rhetoric is a primary tool for rulers, the "argument" can be sharpened like a weapon—just as in times of war, force becomes the ultimate resolution. When words lose their power, violence steps in as the "logical" extension of that failed rhetoric, reinforcing the brutal truth behind power dynamics. Language shapes consent and dissent, builds and destroys cities, and creates love and hate on a mass scale. It operates within specific groups, at specific times and territories. This discourse is a closed system—inevitably prone to entropy and chaos. To avoid collapse, you either open the system or increase the scale and complexity. But ultimately, planned obsolescence, in language and society, is unavoidable. To protect yourself, you simplify your language, reducing nuance. There's a natural limit to complex language—a protective mechanism, if you will. Not only does language evolve, but so does instinct for its collapse. Meaning degrades, and simplification sets in. Intelligence and rationality can be dangerous, as those in power often justify mass harm in the name of stability. History shows that intelligent, rational rulers can commit atrocities more efficiently than simpler, less sophisticated leaders. Verbal abuse is often more insidious than physical violence. Advanced forms of cruelty, like torture, emerge from highly developed civilizations with complex languages. The awful pleasure in harming others is fueled by myths, stories, and explanations. Evil itself often begins as a linguistic creation, designed to divide and incite conflict. There are linguistic constructions meant to justify violence. Evil must be defined through language before it can be acted upon. When language leads to chaos and collapse the end of equilibrium is reached. Semantic entropy is the point where rational systems reach their maximum lack of meaning. Think of the myth of the Tower of Babel—when humans united and aimed to reach the power of gods, they were thrown back into division and tribalism. Language fragmented, and they returned to arguing and conflict. It's as if the gods foresaw the destructive potential of language in expanding societies. The planned obsolescence of language is built into the culture. Every time people aim to reach higher, communicate with gods, or understand the secrets of nature, their complex language collapses into babble—hence, the Tower of Babble. The word "collapse" means "fall together," from Latin *collapsus*, of *com* "with, together" (see *com-*) + *lapsus* "a slipping and falling, a landslide; falling into error," from "*labi*"- "to glide, slip, slide, sink, fall; decline, go to ruin," which is of unknown etymology. The collapse of a complex linguistic structure sometimes is just "falling into error together".

Fooled again

The lyrics of the song "Won't Get Fooled Again" by The Who reflect a deep cynicism about any possible political change, expressing the idea that despite revolutionary upheaval, society often ends up under similar leadership. The famous line, "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss," suggests that after revolutions or significant political shifts, little truly changes in terms of power structures and the nature of leadership. The song critiques political language and revolutionary slogans, implying that they are often tools of manipulation. People are "hypnotized" by the allure of change, but in the end, the system remains fundamentally the same. This reflects a broader disillusionment with the promises of political movements that

ultimately result in a return to familiar patterns of control and governance. The lines in the song speak to a cycle where society knows it is being fooled yet continues to go through the motions. The political language, filled with miscommunication and deception, becomes an integral part of maintaining societal order, even if that order is built on lies. Ultimately, the song implies that we need a new leader or system, but it acknowledges the grim reality that any new boss may not be much different from the old one. The "hypnotized" represent people who have been manipulated or brainwashed, and because they are so deeply convinced, they can't see the deception themselves. They are not consciously lying because they fully believe in the truth they've been fed, highlighting the idea that many people will continue to follow the same cycles of power without questioning them. But the lyrical hero who sings this song recognizes the futility in the changes around him. While he is prepared to survive and protect his family, he also accepts that the "new" revolution may ultimately be no different from the previous system. The repeated refrain "We don't get fooled again" is ironic — even though people hope they won't be fooled, history guarantees that they will be fooled again, and happily. In the end is "the same as the old boss," showing that revolutions often replace one flawed system with another that's fundamentally similar. This critique aligns with the concept that political language often relies on doublespeak or manipulation, where change is more superficial than substantive. Despite the initial hope for real change, people end up in similar positions of disillusionment, repeating the same mistakes. For we know that we will get fooled again. The hypnotized are lied to again. But the hypnotists—the leaders, influencers, or manipulators—are not fully in control. Even though they seem to hold power over the hypnotized masses, they too are deceived by societal expectations or the lies they tell themselves to maintain their position. They too are being influenced by forces beyond their understanding or control. This could point to a cycle where everyone, from top to bottom, is trapped in layers of illusion, unable to break free from the system of lies. This conspiracy of speech is the nature of our political language. In this scenario, the hypnotists are not malicious masterminds; rather, they are part of the same flawed, cyclical system. They may believe in their authority or righteousness, but they are ultimately deceived just like everyone else. But there is a third group, between the hypnotist and the hypnotized. They are the woken, the dissenters, the rock stars who are brave enough to tell the truth. But the lyrical hero in the song is very aware that he is part of the conspiracy. Even those who think they are not "hypnotized" like others—whether it's through politics, media, or authority—are themselves mesmerized and co-opted by the forces they oppose. In the conspiracy of political language dissent becomes a commodity and in a consumer-driven world, even anti-establishment statements can become part of the media marketplace. The book "The Rebel Sell"²⁷ suggests that rebellion or revolutionary ideals are packaged and sold to the masses, often by the very system they seek to resist. This could manifest through language that presents a facade of rebellion but ultimately serves commercial interests. It is a cyclical deception where rebellion becomes another cog in the machine, sold to the people as a solution but ultimately serving the same forces of power. The manipulation might be systemic, embedded in ideologies, power structures, or cultural norms that condition the rulers, the ruled, and the rebels to accept and propagate the same old patterns, even when they think they are creating something new or different. This concept highlights the futility of political language for societal changes that don't address the deeper, underlying issues. Why the political language can't be jammed? All attempts to disrupt or challenge political discourse through symbolic acts or countercultural rebellion often fail within an existing framework. Any form of alternative expression is quickly absorbed by the capitalist system. Whether it's politics,

²⁷ Heath, J. and Potter, A. (2004). *The Rebel Sell*.

journalism, or slogans, these forms of dissent are turned into commodities and sold back to the public. Instead of challenging the system, they become part of it, self-consuming their own power. The words of rebellion are commodified and turned into products. This weakens their original political message, making them superficial and ineffective as tools for change. The system encourages individualistic expressions of dissent because it can profit from them, so these expressions don't disrupt the underlying power structures. Focusing on lifestyle rebellion—such as alternative fashion or consumer choices—gives the illusion of political engagement but distracts from the need for organized, collective action. Real political change requires systemic efforts, not just symbolic gestures or alternative rhetoric. When the words of rebellion are commodified, political language loses its oppositional power. Once symbols of resistance become part of mainstream culture, they no longer serve as challenges to the system. They may still appear rebellious, but their impact is superficial, failing to address the deeper structures of power. Political language can't be jammed because symbolic rebellion is easily co-opted by the very system it seeks to challenge, turning genuine dissent into marketable products and distractions that don't lead to real change. The rebel, despite his defiance and resistance, seems to ultimately accept that he will be fooled again. He's aware that revolutions often lead to superficial change, where new leaders simply replace old ones, and the system itself remains intact. The rebel is not a true leader of change but merely a "singer of change," someone who can express the desire for transformation but lacks the power or influence to bring about real systemic change. His role is purely linguistic—he can inspire, provoke thought, or raise awareness, but he remains trapped in the cycle he critiques. His song is similar to the speech of the barber in "The Great Dictator." The speech is moving, sincere, and inspiring, yet, like the song, it is ultimately just words—aspirational but ineffective in causing tangible, lasting change. Yes, the singer admits that "we will be fooled again," recognizing the cycle of false promises and superficial change. Unlike idealistic speakers, he understands that new systems often mirror the old ones. This admission reflects a realistic, even cynical, view of revolutions, where despite the hope for transformation, the underlying power structures remain the same. By acknowledging this, the singer brings a sense of honesty, accepting that true change is rare, and the cycle of deception continues. In a way, this is a more honest stance. The singer isn't pretending that he or anyone else will break the cycle—he sees the pattern repeating and admits it openly. This gives his position a kind of authenticity, even if it's tinged with resignation. While there is no grand solution offered, there is at least clarity and self-awareness in his understanding of the flawed nature of human language and power structures. The singer's words are a dance of nonsense, tautologies, and self-consuming concepts—beautiful in form yet purposeless. His language exists purely for its own sake, revealing the futility of change while undoing itself. In this poetic self-destruction, his expression becomes art, where meaning dissolves poetically in the beauty of contradiction. A poetic "song for change" is the fullest possible language. The fullest expression of what words can accomplish.

"I'll tip my hat to the new Constitution
 Take a bow for the new revolution
 Smile and grin at the change all around
 Pick up my guitar and play
 Just like yesterday
 Then I'll get on my knees and pray
 We don't get fooled again
 Don't get fooled again, no, no

Yeah
 Meet the new boss
 Same as the old boss"
"Won't Get Fooled Again" by the Who

2. Necessity of obsolescence

A Ticket to Tranai

The protagonist of Robert Sheckley's "A Ticket to Tranai"²⁸ encounters a society that appears perfect but conceals its flaws beneath a veneer of utopia. The annotation reads: "A dystopia is a supposed eutopia because there are no laws. But all women are kept in stasis, taxation is by robbery, divorce is by murder, and governmental change is by assassination." One of the story's most striking elements is the invention of "planned obsolescence" and "designed discomfort," which the protagonist introduces as a way to revive the economy. These concepts serve as a sharp critique of consumer culture, demonstrating how artificially induced scarcity and dissatisfaction can drive continuous consumption and economic activity.

Sheckley's satire mirrors real-world practices where companies design products to fail or become obsolete, ensuring a cycle of constant replacement and upgrading. This cycle benefits the economy by keeping industries active and profits high, even as it manipulates consumer needs and desires. The protagonist's "innovation" is not about societal advancement but about perpetuating a system that values profit over genuine progress, echoing the ethical concerns surrounding modern consumerism. The story goes further, suggesting that planned obsolescence might actually serve as a social stabilizer. By creating ongoing demand for new products and services, it keeps people engaged in work and consumption, fostering a sense of purpose and progress. In a society where work defines personal and societal value, this endless cycle of production and consumption prevents stagnation and maintains social order. Sheckley's narrative ultimately questions the rationality and ethics of such systems, suggesting that the apparent logic of societal structures is often upheld by artificial constructs like planned obsolescence. These ideological constructs may provide a comforting illusion of meaning and purpose, even as they perpetuate a cycle of superficial progress. In this view, planned obsolescence becomes more than just an economic strategy—it's a necessary fiction that keeps the machinery of society running, ensuring that individuals feel their contributions are meaningful, even if the true value of those contributions is questionable.

Planned obsolescence

The concept of planned obsolescence finds its origins in the early 20th century, with one of the earliest references being Bernard London's 1932 pamphlet, "Ending the Depression Through Planned Obsolescence". London proposed a radical idea where the government would legally mandate the obsolescence of personal-use items to stimulate perpetual purchasing and economic activity. However, it was in 1954 that the term truly gained traction, thanks to

²⁸ Sheckley, R. (2014). *Citizen in Space*. Open Road Media.

American industrial designer Brooks Stevens. Preparing for an advertising conference in Minneapolis, Stevens casually chose "planned obsolescence" as the title of his talk, a decision that would etch the phrase into the lexicon of modern consumerism. For Stevens, planned obsolescence meant "instilling in the buyer the desire to own something a little newer, a little better, a little sooner than necessary."²⁹ As the phrase gained popularity, it became a point of contention. By the late 1950s, planned obsolescence had become synonymous with products deliberately designed to break down or go out of style quickly, driving continuous consumption. The concept was so ingrained in the public consciousness that even Volkswagen, in its iconic 1959 advertising campaign, took a stand against it. The ads, created by Doyle Dane Bernbach, proudly declared, "We do not believe in planned obsolescence," positioning Volkswagen as a bastion of durability in a market increasingly dominated by disposability. One memorable ad simply stated, "No point in showing the 1962 Volkswagen, it still looks the same," highlighting the brand's resistance to unnecessary changes. The critique of planned obsolescence deepened with the publication of Vance Packard's "The Waste Makers" in 1960. Packard's work exposed the systematic efforts by businesses to create wasteful, debt-laden, and perpetually dissatisfied consumers. He dissected planned obsolescence into two categories: "obsolescence of desirability" and "obsolescence of function". The former, also known as "psychological obsolescence", referred to the strategy of making a product feel outdated in the mind of the consumer, even when it was still perfectly functional. Industrial designer George Nelson encapsulated this idea succinctly when he noted, "Design ... is an attempt to make a contribution through change. When no contribution is made or can be made, the only process available for giving the illusion of change is 'styling'."³⁰

Manipulation of language

In the era of mass media, language itself becomes a commodity, with words serving as the products we consume to express our identity and social status. Just as we rely on material goods, our economy now demands that we treat language—words, phrases, and slogans—as items that define our place in society. The ritual of communication becomes a consumptive act, where our spiritual and ego satisfaction is found in the phrases we adopt and the slogans we embrace. The more pressure we feel to conform to social norms, the more we express our individuality through carefully chosen words and catchphrases. These linguistic items, like material goods, must be used up, replaced, and discarded with increasing urgency. Our identities are shaped by the words we speak, the hashtags we use, and the slogans we champion, just as our status is defined by the things we buy and display. To sustain this system, language must be consumed rapidly and at high prices. New slogans, trends, and phrases constantly emerge, and the old ones are discarded, much like fashion or technology. Just as we seek ever-more complex and costly goods, we hunger for more elaborate and exclusive language—words that give us social capital and prestige. In this cycle, language is both the product and the marker of social worth, with ever-evolving expressions replacing the last in an endless pursuit of relevance and individuality. The relentless production of new words, phrases, and ideas—often designed to capture attention fleetingly—creates a linguistic landscape cluttered with discarded concepts and forgotten meanings. The concept of "planned obsolescence of language" mirrors the strategy where products are deliberately designed with a limited lifespan to encourage

²⁹ Adamson, G. and Stevens, B. (2003). *Industrial Strength Design*. MIT Press.

³⁰ Packard, V. (2011). *The waste makers*. Brooklyn, Ny: Ig Pub.

frequent replacement. In the linguistic context, this idea refers to the intentional or systematic erosion, manipulation, or transformation of language, making certain words, phrases, or meanings obsolete over time. It is a language that cancels itself over time using self-consuming concepts. What is left of the once-powerful ideas are just tautologies and nonsense. Just as physical products are made to wear out or become unfashionable to drive continuous consumption, language can be shaped to favor constant renewal and proliferation at the expense of clarity and durability. This guarantees endless knowledge production and linguistic consumerism. This phenomenon reflects a preference for quantity over quality, as those who shape language—writers, media, publishers, politicians, educational institutions, etc.—may prioritize the relentless production of content over the refinement of meaningful communication. The result is a linguistic environment where the rapid turnover of empty ideas and fake expressions is encouraged, often leading to a degradation of clear and simple language. In contrast, one might consider the value of investing in “handcrafted linguistic luxury”—a focus on bespoke, custom-made private language that prioritizes quality and depth over mass production. This approach values the time and effort required to craft language with care, much like the difference between mass-produced goods and artisanal creations. Instead of rushing to produce new texts every day, in language, true quality demands patience and deliberate craftsmanship, rather than the haste of constant output. The notion of planned obsolescence in language, therefore, raises important questions about the balance between linguistic quantity and quality. Just as the technology cycle is constrained by design time, the creation of meaningful language is limited by the time it takes to develop and refine ideas. By focusing on durability, clarity, and the repairability of language—much like advocating for sustainable practices in product design—people can push back against the forces that drive linguistic obsolescence and work towards a more thoughtful, sustainable approach to communication. This shift would favor long-term understanding and connection over the fleeting satisfaction of novelty, much like choosing a handcrafted item over a disposable one. The planned obsolescence of language refers to the deliberate erosion or manipulation of language, where certain words, phrases, or meanings are systematically phased out or redefined to suit new cultural trends, political agendas, or commercial interests. Much like with technology, this process creates a kind of linguistic waste—words and ideas that are discarded and forgotten as quickly as they are created, leading to a dilution of cultural depth and historical continuity. The socio-cultural impact of this linguistic obsolescence and waste is profound. Language is a living archive of human experience, a repository of cultural knowledge and identity. When language is manipulated and eroded, entire communities can lose touch with their heritage and history. The constant churn of linguistic trends fosters a culture of disposability, where the emphasis is on novelty and surface-level communication rather than on preserving the richness and diversity of our linguistic heritage. This not only weakens the ties that bind communities together but also diminishes our collective ability to engage in meaningful discourse. From the perspective of a semantic environment, the planned obsolescence of language parallels the wasteful practices seen in consumer culture. The relentless production of new language forms, whether in media, advertising, or academia, often serves to generate more consumption—of products, ideas, and content—while leaving behind a trail of linguistic debris. This contributes to a broader culture of overconsumption, where resources are expended on the creation of transient, disposable content rather than on sustaining and enriching the cultural ecosystem. To mitigate the socio-cultural and semantic impacts of linguistic obsolescence, people must adopt a more

sustainable approach to language. This means valuing linguistic durability and promoting the preservation and revitalization of endangered languages and dialects. It also involves fostering spaces for thoughtful, reflective communication that resists the pressure for constant novelty and instead honors the depth and history embedded in our words. In the same way that a circular economy seeks to extend the life of physical products through reuse, repair, and recycling, a sustainable approach to language would prioritize the conservation of linguistic resources, ensuring that cultural and intellectual heritage is not lost in the relentless drive for the new. By doing so, people can create a more resilient and culturally rich society, one that values the enduring power of words and ideas over the fleeting allure of linguistic trends. Jeremy Bulow's 1985 paper titled "An Economic Theory of Planned Obsolescence"³¹ examines how firms deliberately design products with a limited useful lifespan to increase future sales. The theory suggests that manufacturers intentionally create goods that will become non-functional after a certain period, compelling consumers to buy upgrades. Bulow presents a framework for understanding how planned obsolescence can influence economic outcomes, particularly in monopolistic or highly competitive industries. What if Bulow's theory is reimagined as "A Linguistic Theory of Planned Obsolescence," tailored to the concept of Planned obsolescence of language where language is intentionally manipulated for profit and increased linguistic output rather than clarity and quality:

“Linguistic Theory of Planned Obsolescence”

Abstract:

This theory examines how language creators—such as writers, media, publishers, politicians, institutions, academia, schools, etc.—intentionally foster linguistic obsolescence to drive continuous consumption of new language products. Instead of prioritizing clarity, simplicity, and quality in communication, these stakeholders perpetuate a cycle of complexity, jargon, and neologism. This cycle is designed to maintain and increase demand for new books, lectures, speeches, and other linguistic outputs, leading to a proliferation of content that is often opaque and convoluted, rather than easily understood.

Introduction:

Language is a powerful tool for communication, but in the hands of certain stakeholders, it can be manipulated to serve economic and institutional interests rather than the public good. This theory explores how the deliberate complication and constant evolution of language serve as a strategy to generate profit and maintain control over the flow of information. By creating linguistic products that quickly become obsolete or difficult to understand, these stakeholders ensure a steady demand for new materials, thereby sustaining their own relevance and economic gain.

Mechanisms of Linguistic Obsolescence:

Intentional Complexity:

Creators of language products, such as academics, journalists, and politicians, often introduce complex jargon, acronyms, and specialized terminology. This intentional complexity

³¹ Bulow, J. (1985). An economic theory of planned obsolescence. Chicago: Center For The Study Of The Economy And The State, University Of Chicago.

makes older materials quickly seem outdated or irrelevant, compelling consumers to seek out the latest works to stay "up to date." The more complex and esoteric the language becomes the greater the demand for new interpretations, explanations, and updates.

Rapid Innovation in Language:

The relentless introduction of new words, phrases, and linguistic trends creates a sense of urgency and novelty. Similar to how new technology models are released frequently to replace older ones, language is continuously updated with new terminologies that make previous expressions seem old-fashioned or inadequate. This strategy ensures that language consumers—students, professionals, and the general public—must constantly purchase new materials, attend new seminars, and follow new discourses to remain linguistically competent.

Institutional Endorsement of Change:

Educational institutions and publishers play a crucial role in endorsing and propagating linguistic obsolescence. By frequently revising curricula, updating textbooks, and promoting new academic works, they reinforce the idea that language is a dynamic, ever-changing entity. This creates a perpetual market for new editions of textbooks, updated courses, and revised reference materials, ensuring continuous revenue for those involved in the production and distribution of language.

Media Amplification:

The media serves as a powerful amplifier of linguistic trends and innovations. By adopting and popularizing new language forms—whether through news, entertainment, or social media—media outlets contribute to the perception that language must constantly evolve. This not only drives demand for new content but also creates a culture where older forms of expression are quickly discarded or ridiculed, furthering the cycle of planned obsolescence.

Political and Corporate Exploitation:

Politicians and corporate entities exploit language obsolescence to shape public discourse and maintain control over narratives. By introducing new buzzwords, policy terms, and marketing language, they can manipulate public perception and discourse. This manipulation ensures that the language of previous administrations or product cycles is quickly forgotten and replaced by new terminology that requires fresh understanding and interpretation, thus driving demand for new political or corporate messaging.

Impacts of Linguistic Obsolescence:

Erosion of Clarity and Understanding:

The constant production of new language forms can lead to a dilution of meaning and a decline in the quality of communication. As language becomes more complex and fragmented, the average person's ability to communicate clearly and effectively diminishes. The emphasis on novelty over clarity results in a populace that is more confused and less able to engage in meaningful discourse.

Economic Exploitation:

Just as planned obsolescence in products leads to economic exploitation, so too does linguistic obsolescence. Consumers of language—whether students, professionals, or the general public—are compelled to spend money on new books, courses, and materials to keep pace with the latest linguistic trends. This constant consumption benefits those who produce and distribute language products, but it imposes a financial burden on the consumer.

Social and Cultural Fragmentation:

As language becomes more specialized and compartmentalized, different segments of society may begin to speak in increasingly divergent ways, leading to social and cultural fragmentation. The constant evolution of language can create barriers to communication between different generations, social classes, and professional groups, exacerbating divisions within society.

Conclusion:

The planned obsolescence of language is a deliberate strategy employed by various stakeholders to maintain economic and institutional power. By fostering a cycle of constant linguistic innovation and complexity, these stakeholders ensure a continuous demand for new language products, at the expense of clarity and quality in communication. This strategy not only drives profit but also reinforces the authority of those who control the production and dissemination of language. As a result, society is left with a language that is less about effective communication and more about sustaining a perpetual cycle of consumption and control.”

This reimagined “Linguistic Theory of Planned Obsolescence” highlights how language, much like consumer products, can be subject to planned obsolescence, driven by the interests of those who benefit from continuous linguistic innovation and complexity. But what if that planned obsolescence extends beyond a human profit-driven strategy to something inherent in natural laws of entropy and dissipation? If applied to language, this theory suggests that language evolves and decays much like any physical system. Entropy, the principle that systems move toward disorder, could explain how languages become increasingly complex or fragmented over time, necessitating renewal or replacement. By continuously introducing new linguistic forms, jargon, or frameworks, the complexity of communication increases, ensuring that only those with access to certain information can fully participate. This dynamic not only drives profit by creating a market for language products but also reinforces authority by making certain forms of communication inaccessible to the general population. As a result, language shifts from a tool for effective communication to a commodity that must be constantly consumed, upgraded, and replaced. Those who control the production and dissemination of language—such as government institutions, media, and corporations—benefit by remaining gatekeepers of communication, while society is left with a constantly shifting linguistic landscape that prioritizes consumption over clarity. This miscommunication theory could be extended to include how language in politics, marketing, and academia often evolves not to improve understanding, but to confuse, control, or exclude. Just as planned obsolescence in products generates profit and dependency, the obsolescence of language ensures that power structures remain intact, as those who can’t keep up with the latest linguistic trends are left out of critical discourse. Just as systems governed by entropy eventually reach a state of collapse and transformation, language systems—if burdened by complexity, overuse, and manipulation—might similarly break down. This breakdown could then lead to a new equilibrium in language, possibly through the emergence of simpler or more universal forms of communication.

Critique of Communication

In “Critique of Information”³², Scott Lash offers a penetrating analysis of the information age, highlighting the commodification and overwhelming proliferation of data that shape our contemporary world. Extending Lash's critique to the realm of language reveals a similar phenomenon where linguistic overload is a reflection of information overload. Words, phrases, and linguistic trends are deliberately engineered to become obsolete, driving a relentless cycle of consumption that mirrors the excesses of the information economy. Lash contends that the information age has inundated us with a torrent of data, much of it devoid of meaning or substance. This critique is equally applicable to language, where the unceasing production of books, articles, speeches, and media content has created a linguistic landscape characterized by overwhelming excess. Just as the flood of information can desensitize and overwhelm, the constant churn of language erodes our ability to communicate effectively and meaningfully. The emphasis on quantity over quality—where creators of language prioritize sheer volume over clarity and depth—has resulted in a society awash in words, yet often lacking true understanding or insight. Much like Lash’s critique of the superficiality of modern information, we must scrutinize the superficiality of language that is designed to quickly become obsolete. This obsolescence drives a never-ending cycle of linguistic consumption, where words and ideas are discarded as soon as the next trend emerges. What are the economics of linguistic obsolescence? Exploration of the information economy can be likened to the economics of language production, where language itself is treated as a disposable commodity. The planned obsolescence of language is no accident; it is a calculated strategy to keep consumers perpetually engaged with the latest linguistic trends, ensuring a steady flow of revenue for those who produce and distribute language. This approach has profound consequences. As language is constantly updated and repackaged, older forms of expression are cast aside, often before they have had the opportunity to fully mature or be thoroughly understood. This stifles meaningful discourse and creates a culture that sacrifices depth and longevity in communication for the sake of novelty and profit. What are the social costs of linguistic saturation? When society is bombarded with an excess of language—much of it shallow or ephemeral—it becomes increasingly difficult for individuals to discern what is truly important or meaningful. The planned obsolescence of language exacerbates this problem, encouraging a focus on transient trends and terminologies rather than on enduring principles of clear and honest communication. This linguistic saturation carries significant social costs. It breeds confusion and disorientation, as the ever-changing influx of new language makes it difficult to keep up with or fully grasp contemporary discourse. It undermines social cohesion, as different groups within society adopt divergent linguistic trends, leading to fragmentation and a lack of shared understanding. Moreover, it diminishes the power of language to inspire and mobilize, as people grow numb to the endless stream of words that inundate them daily. As a call for linguistic reflection Scott Lash’s “Critique of Information” provides a compelling framework for understanding the challenges of the information age. When applied to language, his insights expose the dangers of a culture that prioritizes rapid linguistic production and consumption over the quality of communication. The planned obsolescence of language is symptomatic of a deeper issue—a society that values profit and novelty over clarity and meaning. Reflecting on

³² Lash, S. (2002). *Critique of Information*. SAGE.

Lash's work reminds us of the need to reclaim language from the forces that seek to commodify and dilute it. But what if these forces are stronger than people? What if the nature of knowledge is ephemeral and information is doomed to die?

Decay of information

In Erik Sherman's "Everything Dies, Including Information"³³, the transience of knowledge and the inevitable decay of information in the digital age are laid bare. The article serves as a poignant reminder that, much like physical objects and civilizations, knowledge too has a finite lifespan. Despite our advances in digitization, which offer a semblance of permanence, the forces of entropy and obsolescence remain inexorable. This narrative of decay is deeply intertwined with the fragility of language echoing the impermanence of information. Sherman paints a bleak picture of our current technological landscape, where digital storage systems, though remarkably dense, are alarmingly fragile. Information stored today may become unreadable within a few years, requiring constant migration to new formats to stave off oblivion. This mirrors the obsolescence of language, where the rapid turnover of linguistic trends and terminologies leaves older forms of expression to fade into obscurity, often before they have fully matured or been comprehensively understood. Archivists now face the Herculean task of managing an unprecedented flood of information, much of which is recorded indiscriminately. This deluge complicates the preservation of knowledge, as it becomes increasingly difficult to discern what should be saved and how. Similarly, in the linguistic realm, the overwhelming production of content—often driven by the need for novelty and profit—results in a saturation that dilutes meaningful communication. As Sherman notes, the entropy of information is ever-present, waiting in the wings to erase what has not been carefully preserved. The planned obsolescence of language carries profound socio-cultural implications. In a world where linguistic trends are constantly evolving, older forms of expression are rendered obsolete, often before they have had the chance to contribute meaningfully to the cultural discourse. This not only stifles the depth and richness of communication but also fragments society, as different groups adopt divergent linguistic trends, leading to a loss of shared understanding. Moreover, the incessant churn of language mirrors the broader commodification of communication, where words and phrases are treated as disposable commodities, designed to be consumed and replaced as quickly as possible. This has a corrosive effect on the power of language to convey truth, foster understanding, and build social cohesion. As Sherman highlights, the sheer volume of information—and by extension, language—leads to a kind of cultural amnesia, where significant ideas and expressions are lost in the noise, leaving behind a society that is increasingly disconnected and disoriented. Just as the physical and digital artifacts of our civilization are at risk of disappearing, so are the words and ideas that define our cultural and intellectual heritage. To combat this, we must embrace a more reflective and sustainable approach to communication—one that values the enduring power of language to convey simple meaning, build human relations, and foster clear understanding in an increasingly fragmented world.

Risk of misunderstanding

³³ Sherman, E. (2022) Everything dies, including information, MIT Technology Review. Available at: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/10/26/1061308/death-of-information-digitization/> (Accessed: 21 August 2024).

In John Durham Peters' "Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication"³⁴, the introduction delves into the complex and often fraught nature of communication, examining how the concept has evolved and why it has become central to modern existence. Peters critiques the notion that communication is simply a tool for mutual understanding, arguing instead that it often reveals more about our failures and the inherent barriers between individuals. The modern fixation on communication, he suggests, stems from a deep-seated anxiety about our ability to truly connect with one another—a concern that has only intensified with the rise of new communication technologies. Peters traces the intellectual lineage of communication, highlighting how it has come to embody both the utopian ideal of perfect understanding and the dystopian reality of persistent miscommunication. The myth of communication as an idealized communion of souls is a fantasy. Instead, communication frequently fails, leaving individuals isolated despite their best efforts to connect. This sense of failure is not just a modern phenomenon but has roots in historical moments and technological advances that have reshaped how we think about human interaction. The concept of communication is tangled with intellectual and cultural strands that reflect our era's struggles with itself. It is a term that carries with it a history of hopes and disappointments, symbolizing the human desire for connection while simultaneously acknowledging the ever-present risk of miscommunication. The introduction emphasizes that communication is not just a simple exchange of information but a complex process fraught with the potential for misfires and misalignments. Communication is often marked by impasses and breakdowns. The historicity of communication means that our contemporary understanding of communication is shaped by specific historical conditions and technologies. Peters draws on Walter Benjamin's distinction between historicism and historical materialism to illustrate how the past is not a fixed, linear sequence but rather a series of ruptures and alignments that resonate with the present. Communication, as we understand it today, was made possible by the advent of technologies like the telegraph and radio, which redefined the concept of a quasi-physical connection that could transcend the limitations of time and space. The meaning of the word "communication," also has evolved over time. Originally rooted in the Latin "communicare", meaning to share or make common, the term has come to encompass a wide range of activities, from the exchange of messages to the transmission of thoughts and ideas. Peters argues that the modern emphasis on communication as a means of achieving mutual understanding is a relatively recent development, one that has been shaped by the demands of mass communication and the rise of new media. Ultimately, the critical examination of communication presents it as both a cultural ideal and a source of deep-seated anxiety. People are challenged to reconsider the assumption that better communication will necessarily lead to better understanding and allow instead that communication is often a site of struggle and conflict. By tracing the historical and intellectual roots of our current communication dilemmas, we should question the very foundations of how we think about human connection in the modern world. The quest for genuine communication is a complex, often elusive pursuit that goes beyond the mere exchange of information to touch the very essence of human connection. Our discussions of communication often focus on the technicalities of conveying information, but at its heart, communication is about bridging the

³⁴ John Durham Peters (2000). *Speaking into the air : a history of the idea of communication*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

human divide, understanding others, and fostering community. In every act of communication, there lies an element of risk—the possibility of misunderstanding, the challenge of conveying one’s thoughts and feelings across the chasms of individual experiences and perceptions. Yet, it is precisely this challenge of miscommunication that makes communication so vital and so central to the human experience. It is not merely a mechanical transfer of information but an art form that necessitates empathy, creativity, and a deep respect for the other.

Eutopia of communication

What are the optimal achievements of language? Where is the “eutopia” of communication? (“Eutopia” is an achievable good place, while utopia refers to an imagined place of ideal felicity that doesn’t exist.) Insights from Geoffrey West’s lectures³⁵ on the universal laws governing complex systems offer a compelling framework to support this argument. In the quest to understand how language can best serve humanity, one might argue that the ultimate goals are simplicity and unity. These concepts, when applied to language, provide a foundation for clear communication, social cohesion, and the prevention of harm. Why are simplicity, clarity, and accessibility so important for optimal communication? Geoffrey West’s exploration of scaling laws, as discussed in his lecture on The Universal Laws of Growth, Innovation, and Sustainability, underscores the importance of efficiency in complex systems. He explains that as systems—whether they be cities, companies, or empires—grow, they must optimize their use of resources to remain sustainable. This principle applies to language as well. Just as a city must streamline its infrastructure to support a growing population, language must be simple to ensure that communication remains clear and accessible. Overly complex language, like inefficient infrastructure, can lead to breakdowns in communication, alienating individuals and creating barriers to understanding. The metabolic rate of organisms and systems must increase with size, requiring faster innovation to avoid collapse. Similarly, language needs to be efficient, allowing for quick and accurate communication. Simple language, like a well-functioning metabolic system, promotes adaptability by enabling ideas to be shared and understood swiftly, fostering collaboration and decision-making in dynamic environments. The role of networks and connectivity within cities can be applied to the concept of language as a social network. Simplicity in language strengthens these networks by making information accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or education. Just as a city thrives when its infrastructure connects all its inhabitants, a society thrives when its language connects all its members. This inclusivity is crucial for maintaining social cohesion and ensuring that diverse populations can participate fully in the exchange of ideas. The principles of a “eutopian” community are unity, cohesion, and shared identity. However, growth can challenge the cohesion of complex entities like cities and empires. As these complex systems expand, maintaining unity becomes increasingly difficult. In the context of language, unity is the glue that holds societies together. A shared language fosters a collective identity, much like a city’s infrastructure fosters a sense of community. When people share a common language, it creates bonds that transcend individual differences, much like the shared infrastructure of a city that connects its diverse inhabitants. When the number of language users grows the unity and shared identity diminish. A unified

³⁵ Joshua Spodek. (2018). 084: Geoffrey West, part 1: Simplicity beneath it all (transcript). [online] Available at: <https://joshuaspedek.com/084-geoffrey-west-part-1-simplicity-2> [Accessed 11 Sep. 2024].

language ensures that complex social, cultural, and ideological networks remain strong. Language serves as the medium through which shared meaning is conveyed, allowing for a common understanding of values and ideas. This shared meaning is essential for building trust and cooperation within a society, much like the networks that sustain a city or an economy. The finite lifespan of systems emphasizes the risks of fragmentation as complexity increases. Just as a city or empire can collapse if it fails to maintain its infrastructure or governance, a society can fracture if its language becomes fragmented. A unified language mitigates this risk by providing a common platform for dialogue, preventing the divisions that can arise when different groups within a society speak different languages or dialects. The challenges faced by expanding dominant languages highlight the importance of balancing simplicity and complexity in preventing the disintegration of complex entities, be they cities or empires. While simplicity and unity in language are essential for social cohesion, there is a need for complexity in certain contexts. Just as cities require complex infrastructure to support their growth, specialized fields require precise language to express nuanced ideas. The challenge lies in balancing this complexity with the broader need for simplicity and unity, ensuring that specialized language does not create divisions or alienate people from the shared linguistic network. Drawing on Geoffrey West's insights into the dynamics of growth and sustainability in complex systems, we can see that simplicity and unity in language are analogous to the optimization of resources and the maintenance of networks in cities and countries. Just as these systems must remain efficient and cohesive to survive, language must remain simple and unified to prevent harm and foster a healthy, functional society. Simplicity ensures clarity and accessibility, while unity maintains social cohesion and shared meaning.

Size and Duration of Meaning

How does the size and longevity of a linguistic community influence the nature of language and the meaning of its words? Could the systematic rise and fall of empires lead to the decay of language? And does this suggest a potential threat of technocratic collectivism and the ultimate fate of humanity? In Rein Taagepera's 1978 work, "Size and Duration of Empires: Systematics of Size,"³⁶ we delve into the cyclical rise and fall of empires through the meticulous charting of historical expansions and contractions. Taagepera's analysis, underpinned by detailed charts, reveals the fluctuating dominion of these colossal entities over millennia, illustrating their sprawling reaches at different epochs. This progression is not continuous but punctuated, marked by quantum leaps in territorial dominion corresponding to breakthroughs in administrative technologies and governance methodologies. These cycles reflect a dynamic interplay between the stabilization around a mean size and abrupt increases in scale due to technological and administrative innovations. Societal structures manifest in discrete-size clusters rather than continuous distributions. Societies leap from the familial bands to tribes, then to chiefdoms, and onward to states, each jump facilitated by a critical mass that necessitates new forms of social organization and conflict resolution. These theoretical frameworks underscore a broader, more systemic view of human organization, suggesting that the size and complexity of social structures—from the smallest bands to the mightiest empires—are

³⁶ Taagepera, R. (1978). Size and duration of empires: Systematics of size. *Social Science Research*, 7(2), pp.108–127. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/0049-089x\(78\)90007-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0049-089x(78)90007-8).

constrained not just by physical resources but by the capacities of governance and communication technologies. As these capacities expand, so too does the scope of effective control and cultural coherence within an empire. This phenomenon of expansion leading to collapse parallels the fate of language and ideas, which, while striving to encapsulate increasingly complex realities, eventually yield to obsolescence. The lexicon and models are emblematic of this transient efficacy, initially apt yet destined for eventual supersession by novel paradigms and understandings. The scope of a concept or term often predicates its impact, yet such impact is inherently ephemeral. The longevity of any given idea or term—its temporal relevance—is similarly bounded. Revolutionary concepts can become stale as newer, more robust frameworks emerge. The language that once adeptly ruled vast empires might now seem archaic or insufficient against new power discourse. Our communicative tools are subject to the same cyclical rise and fall as the empires they once defined. While we can approximate the durability of certain phrases or ideas based on their present utility and the cultural context, all linguistic concepts are temporal constructs facing inevitable obsolescence. The vocabulary and notions we employ to grasp our world are as fleeting as the empires. As these empires ascended, flourished, and waned, so too will the meanings we derive from them. This reflection on the ephemeral nature of both imperial and semantic constructs underscores that both the magnitude and the longevity of our understandings are indelibly tied to the contexts of their inception, all constrained by the inexorable march of time. In conclusion, Taagepera's insights, while rooted in historical analysis, offer a profound allegory for the lifecycle of the very concepts we use to understand human history. The evolution of empires is mirrored in the evolution of academic discourse, with each bound by the inevitable march toward greater complexity and eventual obsolescence. In this light, the study of empires is as much about understanding the past as it is about reflecting on the transient tools we use to forge that understanding.

Linguistic innovation

The ephemeral nature of empires and the lexicons that delineate them are elegantly mirrored in Geoffrey West's work, "Scale: The Universal Laws of Growth, Innovation, Sustainability, and the Pace of Life in Organisms, Cities, Economies, and Companies"³⁷. West delves into the foundational laws that orchestrate the expansion and persistence of complex structures, shedding light on the temporal dimensions of human ambitions. West posits that scale laws—universal tenets applicable across biological entities, urban centers, corporations, financial systems, and arguably languages—illuminate why certain entities prosper while others falter. Echoing Taagepera's insights on the ascension and decline of empires via the metrics of size and duration, West broadens this spectrum, asserting that the vitality of any system, empires included, hinges crucially on its resource utilization efficacy, innovation capabilities, and operational tempo. Within imperial contexts, West introduces the concept of "economies of scale," illustrating how magnified systems, be they metropolises, corporations, or empires, derive increased efficiency through expansion. Yet, this augmentation invariably escalates the challenge of maintaining a unified language, ideology, and purpose across sprawling territories. As empires swell, they grapple with escalating complexity and an augmented risk of disintegration. The "pace of life" in urban and corporate environments is equally applicable to

³⁷ West, G.B. (2017). *Scale : the universal laws of growth, innovation, sustainability, and the pace of life in organisms, cities, economies, and companies*. New York: Penguin Press.

empires. System growth necessitates accelerated innovation and adaptability. For empires, continual innovation is crucial for managing vast lands and a diverse populace. The cohesion of an empire, maintained through shared ideologies and languages, is directly tied to its adaptive capacity. When innovation wanes and the operational tempo stalls, the integrity of shared meanings deteriorates, precipitating instability and decline. Sustainability and growth limitations offer a vital perspective on imperial downfalls. All systems encounter inherent growth boundaries that demand significant innovation or face potential collapse. For empires, this denotes a critical juncture where expansive size becomes unsustainable absent a parallel evolution in governance, communication, and ideology. A waning common language and the dilution of shared meanings indicate surpassing these growth thresholds. This analysis underscores the role of innovation in extending the lifespan of complex systems. Analogous to how corporations must incessantly innovate to remain competitive, empires require continuous cultural and ideological renewal to uphold unity. When the generation of new concepts, linguistic adaptations, and vision renewal diminishes, decline becomes inexorable. The fragmentation of language and ideology is not merely a symptom but a catalyst of decline, eroding the foundational fabric of the empire. Through this lens, the deterioration of an empire emerges as a scaling failure of meaning. Like physical growth, the capability of an empire to maintain a unified and cogent vision faces limitations as it expands. The true binding agent of empires is not merely their territorial expanse or military might, but the collective ideology, aspirational visions, and shared language that forge a unified entity. Like the rise and fall of empires, the magnitude and persistence of meaning are dictated by universal scaling laws. An empire's true strength lies not in its physical breadth but in its capacity to nurture a resonant, cohesive narrative that unifies its diverse constituencies. When this narrative unravels and the coherence of communal language disintegrates, the empire's fate is sealed. The concept of natural limits to growth holds that systems must either innovate dramatically or face collapse. This concept applies directly to the "size" of meaning and language within an empire. As the empire grows, the shared language and ideology must scale to maintain unity. However, there is a limit to how far this can be pushed before the system becomes unsustainable. The fragmentation of language and meaning signals that these limits have been reached, leading to a decline in the empire's cohesion and eventually its power. West's "Scale" teaches us that the expansion of language, akin to the growth of empires, must be both sustainable and adaptable, lest it inevitably lead to decline. As an empire grows, the "metabolic rate" of its cultural and linguistic innovation must increase. This means that the empire needs to continually generate new ideas, adapt its language, and renew its shared narratives to maintain unity and coherence. If the rate of innovation slows down, the system (in this case, the empire) risks stagnation and decline, as it can no longer sustain the complexity required to manage its size.

Complex grammar

In 2019, researchers found that the number of people speaking a language impacts its grammatical complexity. The study³⁸ shows that the size of a community influences how

³⁸ Holloway, R. (2019). New study finds the size of a community group determines how complex grammar can be in a language. [online] Royalholloway.ac.uk. Available at: <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/research-and-teaching/departments-and-schools/psychology/news/new-study-finds-the-size-of-a-community-group-determines-how-complex-grammar-can-be-in-a-language/#:~:text=Site%20search-> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2024].

intricate the grammar of a language becomes. For instance, English, spoken by millions worldwide, forms plurals by simply adding an "s" to a word, while Welsh, spoken by a smaller group, uses a more complex system for pluralization. The study goes beyond previous research by confirming that smaller community sizes can lead to more complex grammar structures, shedding light on the cause behind this pattern. The researchers conducted experiments where small and large groups played communication games. They used made-up words to describe shapes moving on a screen, without relying on any known language. Over time, all groups developed new languages, but those created by larger groups were more systematic and structured, with patterns that made them easier to learn and use. The larger communities face more variations in how words are used, which can cause confusion. To overcome this, speakers develop a more organized grammar, making communication more efficient. This structured approach allows people to convey ideas with fewer words, enhancing understanding. Interestingly, this grammatical simplification might also impact human relations and emotional expression within smaller language communities. In smaller groups, where the language remains more complex, people may develop deeper connections, as the intricate grammar provides more nuanced ways to express feelings and relationships. The close-knit nature of these communities could foster more intimate communication, as the language allows for subtler distinctions in meaning. This finding not only helps explain why languages differ but also offers insight into how human relationships and social dynamics shape communication. As larger groups formed in human history, grammar may have evolved to help people communicate more efficiently in broader, less intimate settings. In contrast, smaller groups may retain more elaborate grammar, potentially preserving a richer, more personal mode of communication. Simplified languages, while making communication easier in large groups, could limit the depth of interpersonal relationships and serve the interests of power and control. In smaller communities, complex languages allow for richer emotional expression and nuanced social interactions, fostering closer connections. However, in larger populations, a simplified language can promote efficiency but reduce the capacity for deeper, more personal communication. From a sociopolitical perspective, easy-to-learn languages favor uniformity, making it easier for those in power to control large groups. Standardized communication reduces linguistic diversity, limits subtle forms of resistance, and encourages functional over relational dialogue. This could lead to a society where personal connection and emotional depth are sacrificed for the sake of efficiency, aligning with the interests of centralized authority. Another study demonstrates that larger communities not only create more systematic languages³⁹ but also do so more quickly and consistently than smaller ones. Smaller groups tend to exhibit more linguistic variation, suggesting a higher likelihood of unique shifts in language use, often referred to as linguistic 'drift'. More intimate groups tend to create languages that are more "handmade" or personalized, with greater variation and subtlety, allowing for more flexibility in expression and adaptation to the group's specific needs and culture. This can result in a language that feels more intimate and nuanced, like something crafted to suit the close-knit community using it. In contrast, languages in larger communities are more like "mass-produced" systems. They tend to be more standardized, structured, and efficient, designed to ensure clear communication across a broader and more diverse population. This streamlining sacrifices some of the personal touch and complexity seen in smaller groups,

³⁹ Raviv, L., Meyer, A., & Lev-Ari, S. (2019). Larger communities create more systematic languages. *Proceedings. Biological sciences*, 286(1907), 20191262. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2019.1262>

favoring uniformity and clarity over depth and variation. In essence, the dynamics of larger communities drive the development of languages that are more structured and predictable, qualities that help ensure clear and successful communication. This highlights the significant role that community size plays in shaping linguistic structure, offering valuable insights into how social interaction scales influence the evolution of language. Larger communities tend to develop more systematic languages, but this shift toward linguistic organization may negatively impact human relationships, emotional communication, and the sense of closeness in smaller groups. Recent research reveals that as languages evolve in larger populations, they become more structured and predictable. The “evolution” is purely quantitative, and its goal is better control and manufacture of consent in big, diverse groups. This may come at the cost of emotional depth and personal connection that more flexible and complex languages in smaller communities foster. In narrower groups, where people interact more closely and intimately, languages often retain more variation and nuance. This allows individuals to express emotions, relationships, and social roles with greater subtlety. The diversity in language structure supports a deeper form of communication, encouraging stronger interpersonal bonds. The language feels like it “fits” you perfectly as if it’s crafted with your input specifically for your community. It reflects shared experiences, culture, and relationships, giving a sense of belonging and personal connection. In contrast, in larger groups, language often feels like something you must adapt to. It lacks that personal touch, and you’re more likely to conform to a standardized system that may not resonate with your individual or community’s identity. In this way, the sense of a true, tight-knit community can fade, as the language feels impersonal, and the “community” itself can seem more like a construct than a genuine collective. The need for efficiency and clarity leads to a more streamlined and systematic grammar. While this makes communication faster and easier, it reduces the space for intricate emotional expressions, flattening the richness of human interaction. The push for more structured language in large communities can thus diminish the level of intimacy in communication. People may rely more on clear, functional exchanges rather than on the subtle, personalized language that smaller groups naturally cultivate. As language becomes more about efficiency and coherence, it might unintentionally weaken the emotional connections and shared experiences that are central to close human relationships.

Social scale

What is the connection between “social scale and structural complexity in human languages?”⁴⁰ The research explores the relationship between the size of language-speaking populations and the complexities of their grammatical structures. It highlights how linguistic elements, such as phonological systems and inflectional morphology, vary significantly across languages. Interestingly, a correlation is found in languages spoken by larger populations tend to have more extensive phonological inventories, but simpler morphological structures compared to those spoken by smaller communities. These findings emphasize the need for further investigation into how social environments shape the evolution of language grammar. Just as evolutionary biology links life expectancy and reproductive timing in mammals, human societies display adaptive behaviors driven by cultural evolution, such as social learning and behavioral flexibility, rather than purely genetic selection. The main idea is that linguistic

⁴⁰ Nettle D. (2012). Social scale and structural complexity in human languages. *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological sciences*, 367(1597), 1829–1836. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2011.0216>

structures are not random or isolated developments; they are deeply influenced by the social contexts of their speakers. The linguistic community must explore how social dynamics shape grammatical systems, advancing our understanding of linguistic evolution as an integral part of cultural progression. How does population size affect language? Is it true that “simpler grammar means larger vocabulary”⁴¹? A fascinating contrast emerges in language dynamics: languages spoken by large populations often have simpler grammatical structures, while smaller communities develop languages rich in structural complexity. However, larger populations tend to create expansive vocabularies, whereas smaller groups may not. This inverse relationship challenges traditional language change theories, suggesting that the spread of linguistic elements depends on how easily they can be learned and shared. Basic vocabulary, which can be learned with minimal exposure, spreads quickly in large populations. Ease of diffusion is the key. Complex grammatical systems requiring frequent, in-depth interactions are more common in smaller, tightly-knit communities, where regular communication allows for mastery of these intricate rules. Where vocabulary is more focused, communication tends to be clearer and more intimate. Shared linguistic patterns and familiarity with specific terms foster closeness and trust, as individuals are more likely to understand each other’s intentions and nuances. The reduced ambiguity strengthens relationships by allowing for more precise emotional and interpersonal expression. In contrast, the larger vocabulary in more expansive, systematic languages used by bigger groups may dilute this personal connection. Speakers adapt to standardized forms, but the language lacks the personalized, culturally specific elements that smaller groups cultivate, potentially leading to more superficial interactions and less deep mutual understanding. The implications go beyond linguistics, hinting at patterns in broader cultural evolution. As societies grow and become more interconnected, cultural forms—like languages—tend to simplify. Historically, richly complex cultural phenomena emerged from small, closely engaged groups. In contrast, mainstream culture, influenced by large, diverse populations, often trends toward simplicity, as seen in the structural simplicity of contemporary popular music. This highlights an important insight: the structural complexity or simplicity of a language, and other cultural expressions, is not merely a result of the number of speakers but also of how effectively these elements are communicated and transmitted within the community.

Ideological competition

The paper "Verhulst–Lotka–Volterra (VLV) model of ideological struggle"⁴² by Nikolay K. Vitinov and colleagues presents a mathematical model to analyze ideological competition within a closed population, like a country. This model draws upon concepts from population dynamics and statistical physics, focusing on the spread and interaction of ideologies within a society. In societal systems, entropy—a measure of disorder or uncertainty—plays a role in the complexity of ideological dynamics. Societal development and ideological struggles are connected with non-equilibrium systems like population dynamics, language extinction, and religious growth, reflecting how entropy increases through the tension between competing

⁴¹ Real, F., Chater, N. and Christiansen, M.H. (2018). Simpler grammar, larger vocabulary: How population size affects language. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 285(1871), p.20172586. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2017.2586>.

⁴² Vitinov, N.K., Dimitrova, Z.I. and Ausloos, M. (2010). Verhulst–Lotka–Volterra (VLV) model of ideological struggle. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*, 389(21), pp.4970–4980. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2010.06.032>.

ideologies. Much like natural laws governing physical systems, ideologies spread and convert individuals through mechanisms of mass communication and interpersonal interactions. The entropy here manifests in how ideologies rise, collapse, or revive (the "phoenix effect"), showing dynamic tension that reflects complex social evolution. The VLV model applied to ideological struggle adapts the classical predator-prey models from biology to a sociopolitical context. In the model, different ideologies (akin to species in a biological system) compete for followers. Two main mechanisms are considered for converting people to ideologies: unitary conversion (mass media influence) and binary conversion (interpersonal interaction). The model also allows for the emergence of ideological tensions as the number of competing ideologies grows. When only one ideology spreads, society reaches an equilibrium where some people adopt the ideology while others remain indifferent. With two ideologies, the competition for followers introduces measurable ideological tension. The steady state results in fewer followers for each ideology compared to a single-ideology scenario, due to the rivalry between them. As more ideologies are introduced, the system shows more chaotic and unpredictable behavior, reminiscent of complex dynamical systems. Tension grows between ideologies as they vie for dominance, reflecting social entropy and increasing disorder. An important aspect of the model is the "phoenix effect," where an ideology that is near extinction can experience a resurgence due to environmental or social changes. This revival effect highlights the non-linear and chaotic nature of ideological competition, where slight changes in conditions can dramatically alter the outcomes, preventing the total collapse of an ideology and allowing it to affect the population once again. The paper underscores the relevance of modeling societal dynamics, especially the competition between ideologies, using principles from physics and mathematics. The VLV model captures the complexity and unpredictability of ideological struggles, where ideologies may rise, compete, collapse, and revive in a dynamic system governed by laws akin to those in nature, reflecting the entropic growth of disorder in ideological conflicts. The ideological clash described in the study can be seen as a form of manufactured disorder, particularly when viewed through the lens of entropy and societal dynamics. The model illustrates that ideological competition inherently creates tension and instability within a population. As multiple ideologies vie for followers, their interactions generate complexity and conflict, which can lead to increased social disorder. This "manufactured disorder" emerges naturally from the dynamics of ideological competition, as different ideologies attempt to convert individuals through both mass communication (unitary conversion) and interpersonal interactions (binary conversion). The introduction of additional ideologies into a closed system amplifies this disorder, making the system more chaotic and unpredictable—similar to how entropy increases in a thermodynamic system when energy is spread over more microstates. The social and environmental factors that enable such a resurrection suggest that even after periods of apparent stability, latent ideological tensions can quickly lead to new forms of semantic disorder. In this way, ideological clash does manufacture disorder, not necessarily through external manipulation, but through the inherent dynamics of competition and tension between ideologies, which act as a driving force for societal instability and loss of meaning.

3. Semantic Equilibrium

Entropy of Language

What are the signs of societal collapse in a language? In his seminal 1893 text, "The Division of Labor in Society," Emil Durkheim examines the societal role of institutions, differentiating between their normal and pathological functions, albeit acknowledging that interpretations of 'normality' can vary across cultures. Building on this tradition, Robert Merton applied the functional method to scrutinize social institutions, categorizing their functions and dysfunctions as either manifest or latent. This approach aligns closely with Jürgen Habermas's notion of "systematic distortion of communication" and the concept of "communication entropy" defined by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver. The functional method is instrumental in uncovering these latent dysfunctions and elucidating the process of entropy in communication. Originally introduced by German physicist Rudolf Clausius in 1865, the term "entropy" describes the progression toward disorder and energy dissipation within a material system, a principle encapsulated in the second law of thermodynamics. By 1949, Shannon and Weaver had adapted this concept to communication, describing entropy as the predictability level or the expected average information in communication exchanges. This entropy indicates a natural trend toward increased disorder in closed communication systems, leading to diminished information clarity and systemic dysfunctionality. This phenomenon is evident in the manufacturing of dissent within communication systems, a disorderly form that ultimately destabilizes the system, contrary to the order sought through consensus. The claim that entropy in communication leads to information loss and reduced efficacy⁴³ raises the question of whether the language's primary goal is to disseminate information efficiently or merely to capture attention, regardless of clarity. This entropy begins when one message is chosen over another, perpetuating with every subsequent modification, suggesting an inevitable decline in message intelligibility. This decline in communicative clarity and the consequent rise in entropy is linked to the latent dysfunctions within the system, where increased disagreement and censorship, as seen in totalitarian states, exacerbate systemic entropy. The only mitigation, seemingly, is to ensure the communication system remains as open as possible, embracing a wide array of messages and minimal intermediary intervention. The Internet exemplifies this, offering a lower entropy environment compared to traditional mass communication systems due to its capacity for direct, unmediated connections among individuals. Robert Merton⁴⁴ explored these dynamics, associating entropy with the unintended consequences and latent dysfunctions of communication systems in his discussion on the unforeseen outcomes of purposive social actions. Merton critiqued the hubris of educated elites who believe they can completely control complex systems, warning of the inevitable unforeseen and often undesirable consequences of such interventions. Merton's analysis underscores that while societies often strive for functional harmony, the reality is frequently more complex, with potential benefits and detriments varying widely across different social segments. This understanding challenges the notion that societal functions necessarily contribute positively to all community members, illustrated starkly by the systemic dysfunctions during South Africa's apartheid. An example of a situation where

⁴³ Merrill, John Calhoun. Lee, John. Friedlander, Edward Jay(1990). *Modern Mass Media*, Harper & Row.

⁴⁴ Robert King Merton (1936). *The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action*.

societies may not function equally well for everyone highlights that societal ideals cannot be trusted to work universally. What may be functional for some can be dysfunctional for others. A truly effective communication system should aim to foster feelings of consent and unity among all members of society, as much as possible. To assess whether positive functions outweigh dysfunctions (or vice versa), Merton introduces the concept of the "net balance." However, since this societal balance or semantic equilibrium relies on subjective judgment, it is impossible to objectively quantify and compare the positive functions and dysfunctions to determine which predominates. In summary, the functional analysis of communication systems, while often criticized as conservative, fundamentally seeks to discern how societal stability can be maintained amidst the flux of changing ideals and information entropy. This approach requires a nuanced understanding of how societies manage the inherent tensions between unity and diversity, order and disorder, particularly in an era dominated by rapid technological change and global connectivity.

Paucity of informativeness

What is a "semantic equilibrium"⁴⁵? To what extent everything depends on definition? How do people navigate the labyrinth of linguistic ambiguity? Humans define concepts subjectively, with these definitions being relative to the individual and their specific context, rather than being absolute or universal. Semantic entropy serves as a barometer of ambiguity and the paucity of informativeness in language. This lexical characteristic can influence any domain where the meaning of words is pivotal. As a concept borrowed from physics, entropy measures the degree of uncertainty or disorder within a system. Applied to linguistics, it gauges how effectively a word reduces uncertainty in communication, purportedly impacting cognitive processes. This concept extends to the realm of natural language generation, offering a fresh perspective by assessing uncertainty in terms of meanings, not just word sequences. The notion of "Semantic Equilibrium" hinges on subjective definitions crafted by humans, which are inherently relative and shaped by specific cultural and situational contexts. In the sphere of data management, what becomes evident is the communal nature of terminology—no single definition can be universally mandated within an organization. Instead, the effectiveness of data governance lies in showcasing diverse interpretations of a concept, allowing for a natural consensus to form over time. This iterative process eventually stabilizes, reaching a state of "semantic equilibrium" where a preferred definition crystallizes from the myriad of professional perspectives, though it remains subject to evolution as contexts change. This exploration of semantic entropy highlights the transient nature of language and its definitions, underscoring the planned obsolescence inherent in linguistic constructs as they continuously adapt to new informational needs and communal understandings. The Entropy in Language⁴⁶ is used to quantify disorder and mirrors the inevitability of increasing chaos in isolated systems. It measures linguistic uncertainty. If language remains static, isolated from active exchange and evolution, it inevitably succumbs to obsolescence and falls into disuse. In the linguistic context, entropy manifests primarily in the ambiguity of words and phrases, encompassing both the diversity of potential meanings (semantic entropy) and the breadth of concepts a single term can

⁴⁵ Cedric Berger, P.M. (2021) Semantic equilibrium: It all depends on the definition, LinkedIn. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/semantic-equilibrium-all-depends-definition-cedric-berger/> (Accessed: 15 August 2024).

⁴⁶ Lo, J. (2018). The Entropy of Language - Language Insights - Medium. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/language-insights/the-entropy-of-system-life-and-language-43d89c0d185b> [Accessed 19 Sep. 2024].

cover (lexical coverage). The Efficiency versus Clarity problem refers to the trade-off between delivering information quickly and efficiently and ensuring that it is clearly understood. When messages are streamlined for efficiency, they often sacrifice some level of precision or clarity, which can lead to misunderstandings or ambiguity. This concept emphasizes the challenge of balancing rapid communication while maintaining the depth and accuracy necessary for effective understanding. Languages often economize by assigning multiple meanings to single words, enhancing vocabulary efficiency but simultaneously increasing the potential for ambiguity—thus raising a language's semantic entropy. This trade-off between the economy of expression and clarity of understanding is a pivotal challenge in linguistic design. For instance, languages might utilize shorter, more frequently occurring phrases to streamline communication, albeit at the cost of increased interpretative challenges and slower speech rates necessary for comprehension. Conversely, reducing semantic entropy by limiting a word to a single, unambiguous meaning necessitates a larger vocabulary with potentially longer words, increasing the verbal real estate consumed in discourse but allowing for quicker speech delivery. The overall transmission speed of information remains constant across these scenarios, balancing word brevity against clarity. Predictability in discourse refers to the likelihood of which words will follow in a conversation, affecting how efficiently our brains process language. Familiar words trigger specific neural pathways, making recognition faster with repeated use. Strategies like maintaining consistent word order and using gendered nouns help reduce unpredictability by narrowing down the range of expected words. This dynamic reflects the ongoing balance between achieving communicative efficiency and maintaining clarity. As languages evolve, they navigate these forces, shaping how we express and understand meaning.

Emergence of consciousness

What is the relation between entropy, language, and the emergence of consciousness?⁴⁷ The Entropic Theory study explores the emergent nature of consciousness from an ontological perspective, aiming to clarify the evolutionary mechanisms behind consciousness by aligning them with widely accepted scientific principles. It highlights the paradox of information behavior within thermodynamic laws as a key framework. Similar to energy, information within a system is indestructible, following the first law of thermodynamics, and increases with entropy according to the second law. As entropy rises in isolated, emergent systems, information about their processes is obscured, maintaining the system's unpredictability. The emergence of consciousness is a self-erasing process, with its developmental steps hidden from view. This implies that consciousness is an entropic necessity, rather than a result of deterministic processes, and points to the impossibility of fully replicating consciousness in machines, given the unique entropy debt required by living systems. The relationship between entropy in language and the emergence of consciousness offers a profound insight into how complex systems, whether in communication or cognitive processes, evolve. Both phenomena are shaped by the same underlying principle: the dynamic balance between order and disorder, or entropy, which drives adaptation, complexity, and uncertainty. In language, entropy reflects the degree of unpredictability or disorder within a system of communication. As languages evolve, they face a tension between efficiency (simplifying structures for ease of use) and clarity (preserving nuance and depth). High entropy in language can lead to greater ambiguity and misunderstanding, while low entropy might result in rigid, overly structured systems that stifle

⁴⁷ Lugten, P.C. (2024) 'How entropy explains the emergence of consciousness: The entropic theory', *The Journal of Neurobehavioral Sciences*, 11(1), pp. 10–18. doi:10.4103/jnbs.jnbs_6_24.

creativity and adaptability. The evolution of language, much like consciousness, involves a delicate dance between maintaining enough structure to ensure understanding and allowing for the flexibility needed to accommodate new meanings, expressions, and cultural changes. This linguistic entropy parallels the process by which consciousness emerges. Consciousness, as suggested by entropic theories, arises not from deterministic rules or fixed structures but from the increasing complexity and unpredictability of living systems. As organisms interact with their environment, the influx of sensory information introduces entropy into their internal systems. The brain, much like language, manages this entropy by organizing and interpreting inputs, reducing local disorder while increasing global entropy in the broader system. In this way, consciousness emerges as an adaptive response to the chaotic flow of information, enabling organisms to make sense of an ever-changing world. Moreover, just as language evolves to become more efficient in handling vast amounts of information across diverse groups, consciousness evolves to process and integrate the flood of sensory data into coherent thoughts and experiences. The "entropy debt" of consciousness—a system's need to manage the disorder that arises from constant interaction with the external world—mirrors the challenges languages face in reducing ambiguity while retaining expressiveness. Both consciousness and language are emergent systems that thrive on the balance between complexity and simplicity, using entropy as a mechanism to adapt and evolve. This connection suggests that the emergence of consciousness, like the evolution of language, is not a product of static, linear processes but an entropic necessity. As living systems become more complex, their capacity to process, organize, and synthesize information grows, leading to the development of increasingly sophisticated ways of interpreting the world. Language and consciousness are intertwined expressions of this entropic process—both systems that evolve to reduce uncertainty and manage the flow of information, but both are also prone to the unpredictability that entropy introduces. In summary, the entropic theory of consciousness offers a powerful framework for understanding how complexity and unpredictability give rise to self-awareness. When applied to language, it reveals that the evolution of communication systems mirrors the same entropic principles, highlighting the shared foundations between cognitive and linguistic development. Both processes reflect the broader dynamics of entropy, suggesting that the emergence of consciousness and the evolution of language are fundamentally linked as expressions of life's ongoing struggle to balance order and chaos.

The art of disorder

Rudolf Arnheim's essay, "Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order", from 1971, though focused on art, discusses entropy in the context of social systems and communication, providing a philosophical basis for understanding how order and disorder manifest in language and communication. "The entropic decay of social systems is mirrored in the breakdown of communication structures, where language loses its precision and shared meanings become fragmented."⁴⁸ Arnheim's essay is a meditation on the dual forces of order and disorder, often using the concept of entropy, which originates in thermodynamics, to analyze artistic creation and perception. Entropy, in this context, refers to the tendency towards disorder or randomness within a system, while order is seen as the organizing principle that brings structure and meaning

⁴⁸ Arnheim, R. (2010). *Entropy and art : an essay on disorder and order*. Berkeley, Ca [Etc.] University Of California Press.

to otherwise chaotic elements. Arnheim argues that art represents a deliberate effort to impose order on the inherent entropy of the universe, creating meaning and beauty through structure and organization. Just as art imposes order on disorder, language functions as a tool to bring structure and clarity to human communication. However, when language is subject to rapid change—whether through cultural shifts, technological innovation, or intentional manipulation—this can introduce elements of entropy into the communication process. In the context of planned obsolescence, linguistic forms and norms can be deliberately phased out or altered to reflect new realities, technologies, or cultural trends. This can lead to a kind of linguistic entropy, where the stability and coherence of language are disrupted, resulting in confusion or miscommunication. Arnheim's framework suggests that as language becomes more entropic, it loses its ability to effectively convey meaning, paralleling the way art loses its impact if it becomes too disordered or chaotic. Exploration of entropy as a metaphor for disorder in art can also be applied to social systems, particularly concerning social entropy and communication dysfunctions. Social entropy, like physical entropy, refers to the breakdown of structure and order within a society. When applied to communication, this can manifest as latent dysfunctions—misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a general erosion of effective communication. Arnheim's idea that order in art is essential to creating meaning can be extended to communication: as social entropy increases, the order within language and communication systems breaks down, leading to dysfunction. This is particularly relevant in an age where language and communication practices are rapidly evolving, often driven by technological changes. As these changes occur, they can introduce new forms of communication that may not be immediately understood or accepted by all members of society, leading to a kind of communicative entropy. In art, as in language, the deliberate introduction of disorder or the premature abandonment of established forms can result in a loss of meaning and coherence. Planned obsolescence in language could be seen as a force that undermines the stability and continuity needed for effective communication, much like how excessive entropy in art can undermine its aesthetic and communicative power.

Essential order

For comprehension to occur within the human psyche, order is essential. The organization is evident in urban layouts, architectural designs, tool arrangements, product displays, expositions of ideas, or artistic expressions like paintings or music, which are deemed orderly when they allow an observer to discern their overarching structure and detailed ramifications. Such order facilitates distinctions and associations, essential for grasping the entirety and its components, highlighting a hierarchy of significance and control. Order, often first recognized through sensory perception, transcends mere visual or auditory organization to reflect deeper physical, social, or cognitive structures. Progress inherently involves restructuring, as seen in revolutions that dismantle existing orders to establish new regimes. Evolutionary biology suggests that the drive for order is innate, and crucial for survival, as observed in animal social structures and natural formations. Contrary to the natural inclination towards order, the Second Law of Thermodynamics introduces a notion of inevitable increase in disorder, predicting a universal fate of maximal entropy. This principle suggests a progression from order to chaos, where energy, while conserved, becomes increasingly futile. Modern information theory paradoxically associates order with information, defining it as a state opposite of entropy. Yet, it proposes that maximum information arises from total disorder, a perplexing assertion leading to conceptual disarray. In artistic contexts, however, regularity and structure enhance, rather

than reduce, informational value—contradicting the notion that high entropy (or disorder) is synonymous with rich information. Artistic expressions often simplify complexity, striving towards minimalism or facing disintegration. This dualistic nature of art reflects a reduction of tension, either through simplifying structures to their essence or by succumbing to disorder. The artistic theme, therefore, must balance simplicity with complexity to convey profound human experiences. Artistic language transcends mere sensory stimulation; it is a reflection of internal or functional order, portraying significant societal or existential themes. Therefore, the value of an artistic theme is not solely in its complexity but in its capacity to reflect a meaningful perspective on life. While high structural order is necessary, it alone does not suffice unless it encapsulates a substantive, truthful insight into the human condition. In conclusion, while natural forces and philosophical doctrines may predict a state of final equilibrium—a sort of entropic endgame—art exists not to halt life's flux but to encapsulate and interpret its myriad forms and phases, ensuring that even within a constrained frame, it reflects a dynamic, progressing vista of human existence. Artistic or poetic language, while it may seem inherently connected with disorder and decadence, serves a far more complex role. It transcends mere sensory stimulation or chaotic expression by reflecting both internal and societal orders, portraying significant themes about existence, identity, and the human condition. Poetic language thrives on the balance between structure and meaning. High structural order can be important in creating a cohesive piece, but order alone is not enough—art must also encapsulate deeper truths about human experience. Through this lens, art is not merely an agent of chaos or decay, but a way to interpret and make sense of the constant flux of life, even when that flux involves moments of disorder or decadence. In this way, artistic language doesn't oppose the natural forces of entropy or societal decay; instead, it captures and interprets them, offering insight into the phases and transitions of human existence. While philosophical doctrines may predict a final equilibrium—a state of complete entropy or decay—art exists to reflect the continuous unfolding of life, ensuring that even in a world moving toward disorder, there is always space for renewal, interpretation, and evolving understanding.

Civilisation Kill Switch

If the entropy of language is an inherent principle that restarts culture by manufacturing disorder, then art, myths, literature, and poetic language play a vital role in navigating and reshaping this process. These creative forms do not merely resist the chaos; they actively engage with it, channeling disorder into meaningful expression and renewal. Art provides a medium to confront and reinterpret cultural entropy, transforming chaos into forms that resonate on emotional and intellectual levels. It allows society to process breakdowns and transitions, turning disruption into something comprehensible and even transformative. Myths serve as anchors, offering timeless narratives that transcend the shifts in language and societal structures. As civilization evolves, myths maintain continuity and coherence, preserving collective wisdom and shared human experiences, even in times of upheaval. Literature acts as a bridge between the past and the present, capturing the nuances of a culture in flux. It preserves older forms of language and expression while simultaneously exploring new ones, providing a deeper engagement with the entropy that drives linguistic and cultural change. The poetic language embraces ambiguity, metaphor, and symbolism, resisting the functional simplicity of everyday speech. By doing so, it turns the entropy of language into a tool for exploring deeper truths, creating meaning out of disorder, and giving voice to the complexities of human experience.

Together, these creative forms of language help manage and harness the entropy inherent in civilization and language, guiding the transformation and renewal of culture. They turn disorder into an opportunity for reflection, growth, and the continual evolution of meaning within society. The "purposeless purpose" of art and the planned obsolescence of language reflects a shared paradox where meaning and value arise from processes that seem to lack a clear, functional goal. In both cases, the purpose may not be immediately practical, but they are essential forces that shape human experience and culture. In art, the "purposeless purpose" emerges from its ability to transcend utility. Art doesn't exist to solve specific problems or serve a functional role in the way that technology or systems of governance do. Instead, its value lies in its capacity to evoke emotions, provoke thought, and offer new perspectives. Art thrives on its openness and ambiguity, offering a space where meaning is constantly created and reinterpreted. Its apparent lack of purpose is, in fact, its greatest strength—it gives humanity the freedom to explore ideas beyond the confines of the practical and the immediate. Similarly, the planned obsolescence of language introduces a cycle of change that, while it may lead to communication gaps and dysfunctions, also sparks renewal and adaptation. Language evolves and shifts, and this evolution is essential for cultural growth. As old words and forms become obsolete, new ones arise, allowing language to reflect the changing realities and complexities of society. The "purposeless" aspect of this evolution lies in the fact that it is not always a conscious, directed process—yet it serves the deeper purpose of ensuring that language remains dynamic, relevant, and responsive to human needs. In this way, both art and the obsolescence of language share a "purposeless purpose." They don't adhere to a fixed, utilitarian function, but through their continuous cycles of creation, decay, and renewal, they sustain the fluidity and adaptability of human culture. These forces may appear directionless or chaotic, but they are essential for fostering the deeper evolution of meaning, identity, and connection within society.

Simple meaning

On the grand scale of civilizations, languages grow, expand, and ultimately lose their meaning as they become too large and complex. The semantic equilibrium—the balance between words and the concepts they represent—breaks down when a language scales beyond its capacity to hold meaning. This process mirrors what Geoffrey West describes⁴⁹ in the growth of cities and companies, but with a significant difference: while languages decay, cities continue to survive and even thrive. The reason is that cities are built on people, and people can easily create new languages when the old ones lose their utility. Language cannot regenerate itself without human intervention. So, a community of people with close relations and shared memories and traditions over generations is the most valuable entity in any civilization, because it can create its own language. This is what must be protected at any cost, not cities, empires, or any abstract knowledge. Without this "human language machine" the ability of language creation is lost and whole civilizations live relying on foreign official languages. The potentiality for language formation becomes the absolute goal of any sustainable community of homo sapiens. Many tribes or ethnic groups with common heredity, who have maintained their traditions and lived in stable environments for centuries, have successfully preserved their

⁴⁹ Longnow.org. (2024). Geoffrey B. West: Why Cities Keep on Growing, Corporations Always Die, and Life Gets Faster - The Long Now. [online] Available at: <https://longnow.org/seminars/02011/jul/25/why-cities-keep-growing-corporations-always-die-and-life-gets-faster/#:~:text=The%20bigger%20an%20organism%2C%20the> [Accessed 12 Sep. 2024].

languages despite the rise and fall of empires around them. The Basque people are a prime example of this. Despite being surrounded by larger, dominant empires like the Romans, the Visigoths, and later the Spanish and French kingdoms, the Basque language (Euskara) has endured for millennia. The Basque people have long regarded Euskara as a crucial part of their cultural heritage. Throughout history, even when Basque lands were controlled by foreign powers, the people maintained a strong sense of ethnic and linguistic identity, resisting attempts at forced assimilation. In stable environments with consistent traditions, language tends to be passed down through generations as part of daily life. The Basques, like other long-surviving ethnic groups, retained traditional social structures, customs, and practices that reinforced the use of their native language. Despite the dominance of external powers, many communities develop strategies to retain their linguistic identity. The Basque people navigated the pressure from the Roman, Visigothic, and later Spanish and French empires by keeping their language alive within their families and local communities, even if the dominant political and economic languages were imposed in certain contexts. While many groups like the Basques, the Welsh, or the Sami people have managed to preserve their languages for centuries in the face of external pressures, it's not a universal pattern. Other groups in similar situations have seen their languages gradually eroded due to assimilation, colonization, or political domination. Nonetheless, the survival of languages like Euskara demonstrates the resilience of linguistic and cultural traditions when strong local identity, geographical protection, and community cohesion come together. The importance of Basque dialects lies in their role in preserving linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and adaptability. Unlike rigid official languages, which are often vulnerable to decay under empires due to their formalization, Basque dialects have adapted to local contexts, maintaining flexibility and resilience. Each dialect reflects the unique traditions and geography of the Basque people, helping the language survive pressures from dominant powers like Spain and France. This adaptability contrasts with official languages, which can become rigid and detached from their speakers, leading to their eventual decline. The survival of Basque dialects shows that linguistic diversity and regional variation can offer more resilience against external forces, ensuring the language remains a living part of the culture. The example of "Basque dialects" highlights that communities living closely together, protecting their traditions, and sharing common memories are more vital to cultural survival than official languages or knowledge production within nations, states, and empires. It shows that people precede language—the social bonds, shared experiences, and local customs are the true foundation of a culture's endurance. While official languages often become rigid and detached, vulnerable to decline under the weight of imperial or state control, dialects like those in the Basque Country thrive because they remain rooted in the daily lives of the people. These dialects are flexible, evolving with the communities that speak them. The connection between people—through shared traditions and memories—ensures cultural and linguistic survival, not the imposition of a standardized or official language by external forces.

Complex Languages

As dominant languages become more widespread, like in the rise of empires, they initially bring innovation and coherence. Less popular languages gradually eroded due to assimilation, colonization, or political domination. Over time, as official languages grow in complexity, they lose their precision, much like a company that becomes too large to innovate effectively. The intricate systems of meaning within the language decay, leaving behind a structure that no longer serves its original purpose. This is the fate of many dominant languages throughout history, from

Latin to Sanskrit, which once held immense power and meaning but eventually fragmented and faded as the civilizations they served collapsed. However, cities and human societies, unlike languages, persist. Even when a dominant language loses its meaning, the people within cities survive by choosing or creating new, simpler, and more meaningful languages. These new languages, often used in smaller, more cohesive communities, restore a kind of semantic clarity and purpose. They reflect the immediate needs and values of their speakers. In this cyclical pattern, in which an empire's grand language decays and is replaced by the simpler tongue of a new tribe or community, the true glue holding society together is not the language itself, but trust, social cohesion, and justice. In this view, language plays a role in maintaining societal trust and justice, but when it grows too large or too complex, it can no longer fulfill that role effectively. It becomes disconnected from the people it serves, and in doing so, it loses its power. At that point, society risks collapsing unless a new, simpler language—rooted in closer human connections—emerges. This is why human traditions, memories, and relationships kept in thousands of dialects are far more enduring than any single official language. Languages are ephemeral, but people and their cultures continue, reinventing communication in simpler, more meaningful ways as necessary. As civilizations rise and fall, this cycle repeats: a grand language emerges with the expansion of an empire, loses its meaning as it grows, and is replaced by the language of a simpler, more cohesive group. The growth of cities ensures that people survive, adapt, and continue to communicate, but the languages they speak are constantly replaced, reflecting the underlying need for trust and justice rather than linguistic complexity. This complexity, driven by the need to accommodate different regions, cultures, and purposes, leads to linguistic entropy—where the once-clear meaning of words becomes diluted, fragmented, and less precise. When linguistic entropy sets in and distorted communication threatens societal stability, it signals that the system has hit its limits. Yet, when that tool breaks, humans always find a way to build a new one, ensuring the continuation of their communities, their culture, and their collective memory—even when the empire's grand language has been lost to time. This entropy of language mirrors the overall disintegration of an empire itself. As the language evolves to accommodate more people and uses, its original structure weakens. Bureaucratic jargon, regional variations, and new terminologies proliferate, making the language less efficient and less capable of maintaining the cohesion it once provided. The once-unifying language, now burdened by its own growth, loses its ability to clearly express the core values, laws, and ideologies of the empire. Historically, this process can be seen in languages like Latin, which, at the height of the Roman Empire, served as a unifying force across its vast territories. Over time, however, Latin became fragmented into various regional dialects, eventually giving rise to the Romance languages. The same process occurred with Sanskrit in ancient India, which, once a sacred and administrative language, gradually became inaccessible to the masses due to its increasing complexity and exclusivity. As the language decays, it no longer effectively binds the empire's diverse populations. Communication breaks down, and with it, the shared sense of purpose and identity that once held the empire together. This linguistic fragmentation mirrors the political and social fragmentation that often accompanies the decline of empires. The collapse of the language is both a symptom and a cause of the empire's downfall, as the entropy of language erodes the cultural and administrative coherence necessary for the empire to function. In this sense, the entropy of language serves as a kind of "civilizational kill switch." As the dominant language becomes too complex and loses its original meaning, the empire's capacity to govern, innovate, and sustain itself diminishes. Without a clear and effective means

of communication, the empire falters, and the once-dominant language, like the empire itself, is reduced to a relic of the past.

Honest thinkers

In the ideology of every empire or civilization, there seems to be an inherent "kill switch" that can make it obsolete and ensures it never becomes too powerful or eternal. One manifestation of this is the marginalization and eventual exclusion of wise and intelligent individuals. This isn't about the exclusion of popular intellectuals or crowd-pleasing sophists, but rather the marginalization of truly intelligent individuals who reject conforming to social norms or public expectations. These honest thinkers, uninterested in social acclaim, focus on deeper realities and long-term innovation. When society favors conformity and collective stupidity, sidelining these true intellectuals, it loses its capacity to progress, govern effectively, and adapt to challenges. Much like language entropy, which erodes the ability to communicate and sustain an empire, the marginalization of these socially indifferent geniuses leads to intellectual entropy. The culture becomes dominated by shallow ideas and short-term thinking, resulting in stagnation and eventual collapse. This process ensures the exclusion of true wisdom undermines the foundation of its long-term survival. This phenomenon, where the true intellectuals are pushed out of the spotlight and replaced by a preference for conformity, mediocrity, or even collective stupidity, serves as a self-destructive mechanism within the system. The individual thinkers are replaced with intellectual class. When those who are capable of critical thought, innovation, and deep insight are sidelined in favor of more immediate, superficial concerns, the empire undermines its own foundation, leading to a cultural decline that precedes its downfall. Following the entropy of language this marginalization of intellectuals erodes a civilization's ability to govern effectively, innovate, and sustain itself. Language entropy refers to how, as a dominant language grows more complex and abstract, it loses its original meaning and clarity. This breakdown in communication weakens the ability of the empire to coordinate, maintain coherence, and convey its foundational values. Just as a language that has lost its purpose becomes a relic, so too does a civilization that fails to foster its intellectual and creative core. Without the contributions of the wise and the intelligent, an empire loses its capacity for forward-thinking governance, scientific and cultural innovation, and ethical development. When a society collectively embraces conformity, rejecting the challenging ideas and critiques offered by intellectuals, it stagnates. The creative forces that once fueled its rise—philosophical debate, artistic expression, and scientific discovery—are extinguished. Over time, the society becomes too preoccupied with immediate desires and power struggles, while the true thinkers and innovators are ignored or even expelled. This creates an internal entropy that weakens the cultural and intellectual vitality of the empire. In essence, this process ensures that no empire grows too powerful for too long. By rejecting the intellectuals, the empire enacts its own "kill switch"—an inevitable self-limitation. As intellectual rigor, artistic creativity, and philosophical reflection are cast aside, the empire's capacity to adapt and evolve erodes. What remains is a civilization unable to respond to new challenges, a shadow of its former self, and eventually a relic, just like the complex and meaningless language that once sustained it. In this way, both language entropy and the marginalization of intellectuals serve as parallel forms of decline, acting as natural limits to the lifespan of any empire. Both reflect an internal decay that, left unchecked, leads to civilizational collapse. Therefore, the exclusion of the wise and the embrace of collective stupidity is not merely a cultural trend; it is the trigger of the empire's inevitable downfall. This highlights

Schopenhauer's core idea that intelligence is naturally antisocial, whereas stupidity or simplicity tends to align with societal expectations and norms. "All society necessarily involves, as the first condition of its existence, mutual accommodation and restraint upon the part of its members. This means that the larger it is, the more insipid will be its tone. A man can be himself only so long as he is alone; and if he does not love solitude, he will not love freedom; for it is only when he is alone that he is really free. Constraint is always present in society, like a companion of whom there is no riddance; and in proportion to the greatness of a man's individuality, it will be hard for him to bear the sacrifices which all intercourse with others demands, Solitude will be welcomed or endured or avoided, according as a man's personal value is large or small, — the wretch feeling, when he is alone, the whole burden of his misery; the great intellect delighting in its greatness; and everyone, in short, being just what he is."⁵⁰ Intelligent individuals, preoccupied with the broader, more abstract aspects of existence, are often alienated from everyday social interactions. This alienation stems from the gap between their intellectual depth and society's preference for superficial concerns, making them appear acerbic, absent-minded, or uninterested in socializing. On the other hand, those who are less intelligent, being more in tune with basic social instincts, gain an advantage in the social realm by conforming to societal expectations and engaging in common, shallow exchanges. In essence, Schopenhauer critiques society for valuing superficiality over intellect and suggests that the social discomfort experienced by intelligent people is a reflection of society's inability to appreciate deeper understanding. The common person is more sociable in the crowds of mass civilization because they remain grounded in their limited, stereotypical worldview, while the honest intelligent person is alienated due to their individual, expansive, philosophical vision of reality.

Manufacturing Disorder

It is indeed possible that language and communication systems are inherently prone to eventual breakdown. Language, like any evolving system, is subject to change, and as it becomes obsolete—whether through natural progression or intentional shifts—it contributes to social entropy, creating communication gaps. As outdated terms lose their relevance and new vocabulary emerges too slowly to keep pace, miscommunication grows, potentially disrupting social harmony and shared understanding. The increase in social entropy exacerbates these communication dysfunctions, making it harder to convey ideas clearly and leading to more frequent misunderstandings. This destabilization of language, marked by inconsistencies and ambiguities, weakens the bonds that hold communities together, straining social relationships and complicating mutual comprehension. The complex interaction between the planned or natural obsolescence of language, rising social entropy, and communication dysfunctions suggests that linguistic changes can lead to broader social upheavals. As language evolves or deteriorates, communication breakdowns increase, further fueling social entropy and intensifying latent dysfunctions. This highlights the urgent need for a proactive, adaptive approach to language management and communication strategies to maintain social coherence and functionality as society continues to change. Without such measures, the very structure of

⁵⁰ Schopenhauer, A. (2021). *The Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*. Blurb.

language and communication could unravel, contributing to a decline in societal cohesion over time. Could the "Made to Break"⁵¹ principle of obsolescence apply to language just as it does to technology? Obsolescence discussion can be extrapolated to language, particularly how planned obsolescence affects societal functions and communication. Planned obsolescence emerged as a key strategy for driving economic growth in the 20th century. Manufacturers, starting with lightbulbs and extending to automobiles, electronics, and household goods, intentionally reduced the durability of their products to encourage repeated consumer purchases. This practice not only maximized corporate profits but also became a hallmark of consumer culture, leading to a cycle of continuous consumption and disposal. Just as products are designed to become obsolete, words, texts, and books can be seen as undergoing a similar process. Terms, phrases, and even entire languages may fall out of use as societal needs and norms change. In the digital age, where communication technologies rapidly evolve, language itself is subject to pressures that can render certain forms obsolete. For instance, the rise of digital communication has introduced new linguistic norms (e.g., emojis, and abbreviations) that quickly replace older forms. This phenomenon can lead to a kind of linguistic obsolescence where traditional modes of expression are discarded, sometimes prematurely, before new forms are fully understood or universally accepted. This parallels the way consumer goods are discarded before they have outlived their usefulness. The relentless cycle of consumption and waste of information contributes to social entropy by fostering a throwaway culture, where not only goods but also ideas, values, and communication practices are quickly discarded. When applied to language, this throwaway mentality can lead to latent dysfunctions in communication. As language evolves rapidly—sometimes artificially or commercially driven by technological changes—society may struggle to maintain a common linguistic ground. This can result in miscommunication, misunderstandings, and a loss of shared meaning, all of which contribute to social entropy. For example, as newer generations adopt different communication styles, older generations may find it increasingly difficult to connect, leading to generational divides and a breakdown in social cohesion. This raises important questions about sustainability—not only in terms of physical products but also in terms of cultural and communicative practices. The relentless pursuit of the new, whether in technology or language, can have destabilizing effects on society. Just as the environment suffers from the accumulation of waste products, society suffers from the accumulation of communication dysfunctions and the erosion of stable, shared language practices. The "Made to Break" principle is an essential read for understanding the origins and consequences of planned obsolescence in modern consumer culture. The concept suggests that obsolescence isn't just about generating endless consumption but could be seen as an inherent principle that introduces disruption and disorder, potentially resetting the culture from within. By deliberately manufacturing disorder, planned obsolescence forces constant innovation and adaptation, driving both cultural and technological evolution. This cycle of breakdown and renewal creates a system where, paradoxically, disorder becomes the catalyst for continual reinvention and progress.

The madding crowd

The phrase "Madding Crowd's ignoble strife," borrowed from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", evokes the chaotic and unthinking nature of mass behavior, where individual reasoning is lost to the frenzy of the crowd. Similarly, "Extraordinary Popular

⁵¹ Slade,G (2007). *Made to Break : Technology and Obsolescence in America*. Harvard University Press.

Delusions and the Madness of Crowds”⁵², in the original 19th-century text by Charles Mackay delves into the dangers of mass hysteria, irrational trends, and groupthink. ”The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity”⁵³ by Douglas Murray extends the exploration of collective delusion into the modern socio-political landscape. Both ”The Madness of Crowds” are insightful explorations of human folly, collective delusion, and the often-irrational behavior of groups. These works emphasize how collective delusion can lead to widespread folly, whether in financial bubbles, political movements, or social trends. Both highlight how large groups can often act in ways that are disconnected from logic or reason, driven by emotion, fear, or social pressures. These explorations of collective stupidity reveal the fragile nature of human society, where individual reasoning can be overridden by the dangerous dynamics of crowd behavior. Murray critiques how political language, particularly around issues of gender, race, and sexuality, has led to a form of collective irrationality, where nuanced debate is often overshadowed by rigid ideological frameworks. In both works, the central theme remains the same: the dangers of allowing crowd behavior, ideology, or emotional fervor to override individual reason and critical thinking. Although written centuries apart, the books illustrate how collective delusions—fueled by complex, ambiguous language—can lead to widespread irrationality and collective madness. Mackay’s “The Madness of Crowds” delves into the phenomena of collective insanity, where the language of the masses, often laden with ambiguity and sensationalism, exacerbates irrational behavior. The book covers a range of topics from economic bubbles, such as the infamous Tulip Mania, to social phenomena like witch hunts and the Crusades, all of which are portrayed as cases where complex and misleading language has played a central role in amplifying collective stupidity. Mackay argues that as language becomes more convoluted and abstract, particularly in the context of mass communication, it leads to a kind of linguistic inflation, where words are detached from reality, and crowds are driven to irrational behavior. This aligns with the broader linguistic idea that as language complexity increases, so too does the potential for collective madness. As language becomes more abstract and ideologically driven, it can amplify collective stupidity and insanity. The more complex and ambiguous the language, the easier it is for crowds to become detached from reality, leading to irrational behavior on a massive scale. Mackay’s exploration of crowd madness remains relevant today, particularly in the context of modern mass media and social networks, where language continues to play a pivotal role in shaping collective behavior. The book serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of linguistic complexity and ambiguity in public discourse, highlighting how these factors can lead to widespread irrationality and societal harm. Douglas Murray’s “The Madness of Crowds” delves into the complexities of modern identity politics, arguing that contemporary societal discourse has become increasingly irrational, particularly in the way it addresses issues of gender, race, and identity. Murray’s work highlights the proliferation of what he sees as collective madness—a phenomenon where the language of crowds, driven by social justice movements and political correctness, becomes more convoluted and detached from reason. Murray’s central thesis is that modern culture has shifted away from traditional religious and ideological frameworks towards a new set of social markers defined by victimhood and

⁵² Mackay, C. (2019). *Extraordinary Popular Delusions And The Madness Of Crowds*. S.L.: Digireads Com.

⁵³ Murray, D. (2019). *The madness of crowds : gender, race and identity*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum.

identity. He suggests that as these markers become more complex and intertwined with notions of virtue signaling, the language used to discuss them becomes equally complicated, leading to confusion and a departure from rational discourse. The book explores how the language of identity politics intersects to create new forms of social division and misunderstanding. Murray argues that this shift in discourse has led to a rise in collective stupidity, as people are increasingly pressured to conform to a set of ideas that are often contradictory and based on a superficial understanding of complex issues. As language becomes more complex and abstract -terms are redefined, meanings are obscured, and concepts are often taken to illogical extremes- it can foster stupidity and madness within the collective consciousness. Linguistic inflation, where words are overloaded with ideological significance, contributes to a growing collective irrationality. As language becomes more complex, it also becomes more difficult for individuals within the crowd to communicate effectively, leading to increased miscommunication and misunderstanding. This complexity is either a byproduct of the evolution of language or a deliberate tool used to obscure truth and create ideological conformity. In both cases, this language acts as a mechanism for manufacturing disorder. The more abstract and ideologically charged language becomes, the more it alienates individuals from clear, logical thought, resulting in a kind of collective madness. Murray draws parallels between this modern phenomenon and historical instances where the language of crowds has led to social upheaval. He argues that today's social justice movements, much like the revolutionary movements of the past, are driven by rhetoric that is increasingly detached from reality, leading to a breakdown in meaningful dialogue and a rise in social fragmentation. The book has received polarized reviews, with some praising Murray's incisive critique of modern social discourse, while others accuse him of dismissing genuine social grievances. Critics argue that by labeling these movements as "mad," Murray himself contributes to miscommunication and disorder. However, regardless of one's stance on Murray's conclusions, the 21st. Century "Madness of Crowds" as well as Mackay's book from the 19th century serve as a significant exploration of how language, when used as a tool of ideology, can both construct and deconstruct societal norms. It highlights the dangers of linguistic obfuscation and the role it plays in fostering collective irrationality. In conclusion, "The Madness of Crowds" can be seen as a cautionary tale that as language becomes more complex and ideologically charged, it can lead to a kind of collective stupidity, where the crowd's ability to think critically is diminished. This, in turn, contributes to a madness born not just of the ideas themselves, but of the way they are communicated and understood in the public sphere. The language of the crowds is manufacturing disorder.

4. Miscommunication Axiom

Utopia of communication

The phrase "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* can be interpreted through the lens of language, suggesting that human existence is fundamentally shaped by words, communication, and the narratives we create. In this view, the "stuff" of dreams is language itself. Just as dreams are ephemeral, intangible creations of the mind, so too are we made of the words we speak, the thoughts we articulate, and the stories we tell. Language is not merely a tool for describing reality; it is the medium through which we experience and construct reality. Our identities, our histories, and our perceptions are all shaped

by the linguistic frameworks we use. In this sense, we are "made" of language, as it defines and shapes our consciousness, much like dreams do. The phrase underscores the idea that language, like dreams, is both transient and powerful. Just as dreams can dissolve upon waking, so can the realities we construct through language shift, fade, or change. It suggests that the very fabric of human existence — our sense of self, our understanding of the world — is woven from language, and thus, is as fluid and malleable as a dream. In *The Tempest*, Prospero's meditation on the fading spectacle of a masque becomes a reflection of the illusory nature of life. If we reinterpret the "stuff" as language, Prospero's words point to how language constructs the "great globe," the towers, temples, and all the structures of human experience. They exist not only in physical form but in the narratives and words we use to understand them. When Prospero says, "We are such stuff as dreams are made on," he could also be saying, "We are the words, the language, that give shape to our fleeting realities." Human existence is inseparable from language. The words we choose shape our perceptions, our dreams, and even our identities. We are narrative beings, constantly engaged in internal and external dialogues that define our reality. Just as a dream is conjured from thoughts and symbols, so is our world conjured from language. Language allows us to connect with others, interpret our experiences, and build the stories that define our lives. Without it, there would be no way to construct meaning or understand the world. In this sense, the phrase "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" speaks to the core of what it means to be human: we are not merely biological beings, but linguistic creatures, shaped and defined by the language that flows through us. Our lives, like dreams, are built from words, and just as dreams can shift and dissolve, so too can the realities we create through language. As humans, we are inextricably linked to language, which both gives life its structure and reflects its impermanence. Language plays a profound role in shaping not only our understanding of the world but also our vision of ideal societies. Our capacity for abstract thought, creativity, and collective imagination is intricately linked to our ability to use words to convey ideas, imagine possibilities, and construct virtual realities. Through language, we articulate desires, hopes, and visions of a better world—what could be seen as the creation of "utopias." The idea of utopia is inherently a product of language; it is born from our ability to envision alternate futures and express these visions through words. Philosophers, writers, and thinkers throughout history have used language to describe ideal worlds that challenge the imperfections of the present. The very act of imagining and describing utopias—be they political, social, or personal—is a testament to the power of language to shape collective dreams and ambitions. While language provides structure to our lives by giving form to thoughts and experiences, it also highlights the impermanence of those realities. Just as dreams are ephemeral, constantly shifting and dissolving, the realities we create through language are also transient. Societies, ideologies, and even personal identities can be redefined as language evolves, reflecting the fluid nature of human existence. Utopias, too, can shift from one form to another as new words and ideas shape them. Language is thus both a tool for constructing lasting societal frameworks and a reminder of the temporary nature of those constructions. Just as a new language can build utopias, it can also dissolve them, altering perceptions of what is possible or desirable over time. In this sense, humans use language not only to navigate the world as it is but to envision and attempt to create worlds as they could be—utopias that are constantly shifting with the ebb and flow of the words and ideas that define them. The Utopian paradox⁵⁴

⁵⁴ www.youtube.com. (n.d.). The Utopian Paradox | Michael Frachetti | TEDxWUSTL. [online]
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hn-KYxj4DP4>. (Accessed 28 Aug. 2024.)

is that utopia also serves entropy. An image of an ideal world of plenty that eventually brings dissipation of energy and collapse and simplification of certain parts of the system. Like the principle of fluid pressure, if you decrease suffering in one region of the world you increase it in another. This is the law of constant scarcity. The natural end of the realization of any utopia as a land of plenty is Calhoun's Rat utopia. So, it is a cycle of utopias of words that first conquer the minds of millions and then decay and disappear. These towers of words are made to break because there isn't enough energy to sustain them when we try to build them with stone.

Utopian mentality

Karl Mannheim, a seminal Hungarian sociologist and a foundational thinker in the sociology of knowledge, introduced transformative concepts in his pivotal work, "Ideology and Utopia"⁵⁵. Distinguishing between "partial" and "total" ideologies, he explored how certain comprehensive worldviews are uniquely shaped by distinct social groups. Mannheim juxtaposed these ideologies—systems that justify existing social structures—with utopias, which envision transformative societal changes. Mannheim developed the concept of the "utopian mentality," characterized by its incongruity with existing realities and its potential to radically alter them. The utopian mentality is a linguistic construction that expresses dissatisfaction with the present and projects hopeful visions of a radically different future. While ideologies reinforce the status quo, utopias challenge it by presenting alternative possibilities. Language is central to this process, as it communicates both the critique of existing realities and the blueprint for imagined transformative societies. This mentality manifests in diverse forms: Orgiastic Chiasm is characterized by spontaneous, revolutionary zeal without temporal or strategic consideration, often seen in the lowest social strata. Liberal Humanism envisions gradual societal progress through reasoned reform, commonly upheld by middle social layers. Conservatism: looks to the past, idealizing a return to or preservation of traditional values and structures, typically advocated by dominant social classes. Modern Communism predicts a structured, near-future societal overhaul, driven by organized political movements. Mannheim argued for a broadened interpretation of ideology, tracing its evolution from a tool for obscuring truth to a comprehensive framework influenced by a group's social position. He advocated for a "general total conception" where all beliefs, including those of social scientists, are seen as products of their societal context. This perspective suggests that all knowledge is situational and influenced by factors such as class, location, and generational context. Today, Mannheim's theories continue to resonate, particularly his insights on how utopias shape historical movements and the dynamic interplay between ideology and societal change. His analysis remains a critical resource for understanding how societal knowledge and perceptions are intricately tied to underlying ideological structures. Karl Mannheim's "Ideology and Utopia" offers an intricate exploration of the complex relationships between thought, society, and future aspirations. It stands as a profound commentary on how language and communication inherently foster utopian thinking. Through language, people can imagine idealized futures, critique current realities, and propose alternatives. It allows us to express desires for a better world, enabling collective vision and social coordination. As language evolves, so do utopian ideas, reflecting society's ongoing search for improvement and transformation. Yes, the pursuit of utopias often leads to revolutions, wars, and disasters.

⁵⁵ Mannheim, K. (1936). *Ideology and utopia*. London: Routledge.

Idealized visions can become rigid and dogmatic, causing conflict and violence when imposed on others, resulting in societal decay and unintended consequences.

Dead Men's Propaganda

In her analytical work, "Dead Men's Propaganda: Ideology and Utopia in Comparative Communications Studies,"⁵⁶ Terhi Rantanen revisits the seminal phases of comparative communications studies spanning the 1920s to the 1950s in the United States. Rantanen employs a lens crafted from the theories of Karl Mannheim and Robert Merton, unearthing the intricate dynamics of ideology and utopia that governed the early explorations into comparative communications. This exploration not only brings to the fore the pioneering efforts that have shaped modern understandings of media and propaganda but also underscores the ideological biases that influenced these foundational studies. Her research delves into the archival legacies and case studies that reveal how the academic and non-academic sectors contributed to the development of communications studies, influenced heavily by the ideological and utopian frameworks posited by Mannheim. Rantanen highlights how these frameworks created biases in knowledge production, shaping narratives around generational conflicts and the societal roles of insiders versus outsiders. By revisiting these early scholarly endeavors, Rantanen provides a critical retrospective view that connects past methodologies and ideological biases to current challenges in the field, particularly in understanding the mechanisms of war and propaganda in the 21st century. Mannheim's concept of a "crisis in thought" speaks to the deepening ideological divides in today's society, where opposing groups no longer share a common language or discourse. This communication breakdown is significant in the rise of populism, which undermines pluralist values and targets key democratic institutions, such as the media, intellectuals, and international organizations. Populism's attack on these communicative structures reflects a broader crisis in how truth and information are constructed and shared. The utopia of communication—that is, the idea of a shared, open, and truthful exchange of ideas—seems increasingly distant. Wars and conflicts underscore this, as the lines between news and propaganda blur, with each side viewing the other's communication as manipulative. In this context, Mannheim's call for "Wissenssoziologie" (sociology of knowledge) becomes even more relevant, emphasizing the need to critically assess how knowledge and truth are produced and communicated. Today, as academia faces external pressures such as reduced funding and political interference, the utopian vision of communication as a means to foster understanding and societal progress is under threat. Comparative communications research is once again in demand, but the terms of debate are increasingly set by political forces, not by academics. In an age where communication is politicized, Mannheim's insights remind us that the pursuit of a utopia of communication—a space where truth and dialogue flourish—requires ongoing vigilance and critical reflection. The early comparative communication studies were driven by a utopian vision, centered on the belief that communication could catalyze global peace and mutual understanding. Initially, propaganda studies, especially during and after World War II, shaped the foundation of international communication research. Propaganda was often viewed as deceitful, foreign, and something to be studied in the context of national interests, reflecting an "us vs. them" mentality. This distinction carried over into the development of comparative communication, which often relied on external, policy-driven funding, shaping its practical and political orientations. The utopianism in international communication studies is most evident in

⁵⁶ Rantanen, T. (2024). *Dead Men's Propaganda*. LSE Press.

its idealistic view of communication as a tool for promoting world peace and fostering understanding among nations. This belief was institutionalized in frameworks like the UN Charter and later initiatives like the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which viewed global communication as a means to resolve conflict. However, this utopian vision often clashed with the realities of political influence, funding pressures, and the need for pragmatic, problem-solving research. While communication was idealized as a path toward a harmonious global order, it remained a battleground of ideologies, with competing narratives and claims to truth. The legacy of this utopia persists, with scholars still divided on how best to use communication to achieve these lofty goals. International communication continues to struggle with the tension between utopian ideals and the practical, often politically driven realities of research, making it a field where ideologies and utopias remain deeply intertwined.

The myth of communication

Who created the myth of the “positive value of communication”? The concept of “myth” in a semiotic sense refers to an unspoken network of ideas that helps society understand certain topics. Roland Barthes’ “Mythologies”⁵⁷ (1973) is a collection of essays that examines how everyday cultural phenomena carry deeper ideological meanings. Barthes introduces the concept of “myth” in a semiotic sense, where myths are not traditional stories but rather systems of communication that naturalize cultural and ideological messages. Myths, according to Barthes, serve to make socially and historically constructed meanings appear natural, timeless, and inevitable. This process of “naturalization” masks the fact that these meanings are products of signifying struggles—ideological battles over meaning within a society. Through his analysis of various cultural objects and practices, Barthes reveals how myths function to reinforce dominant ideologies by presenting them as common sense, thereby obscuring their constructed and contingent nature. The connection between nature and language is explored through the concept of discourse. A linguist’s definition of discourse as “language in use” intersects with a social theorist’s view of discourse as “a social construction of reality” or a “form of knowledge.” By analyzing discourses, we can identify how certain representations of communication processes become “naturalized,” meaning they are accepted as natural or inevitable. This masks the fact that these representations often embody political or ideological positions, making them appear neutral and unquestioned. In his insightful analysis, “The Myth of Communication as a Positive Value,” Federico Boni delves into the idealized notion of communication as inherently beneficial. “This is the ‘dark side’ of the paradoxical quality of all communication utopias, which began at least with the myth of the Tower of Babel, simultaneously the symbol of a utopia of communication and of the disastrous consequences that followed when attempting to build that very utopia.”⁵⁸ Boni interrogates the utopian framing of communication, pointing out that historical and contemporary discourse is saturated with both technological and social utopias. He challenges the dichotomies often found in communication theories—such as communication versus miscommunication and utopia versus dystopia—proposing a more nuanced understanding of how communication functions within societal constructs. Ideologies often

⁵⁷ Barthes, R. (1973). *Mythologies*. St. Albans: Paladin

⁵⁸ Boni, Federico. (2016) “The Utopia of Communication The Myth of Communication as a Positive Value.” *Utopian Discourses Across Cultures: Scenarios in Effective Communication to Citizens and Corporations*, edited by Miriam Bait et al., Peter Lang AG, 2016, pp. 27–42. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2t4bv7.5>. (Accessed 26 Aug. 2024.)

serve concrete political or social agendas, shaping public perception and stabilizing existing power structures. The utopian visions are not just abstract aspirations but have real-world implications that can reinforce or challenge the status quo. The concept of 'myth' reveals how certain normalized views of communication obscure their underlying political and ideological biases. This naturalization process renders complex social and historical forces as inevitable or timeless, masking their constructed and contingent nature. By dissecting the discourses surrounding communication, we can expose how certain representations become incorporated, turning complex social constructs into "common sense". This critique not only highlights the ideological underpinnings of supposed communication utopias but also underscores the role of scholars and practitioners in perpetuating or challenging these myths. A critical analysis of the mythologization of communication as an inherently positive force calls for a reevaluation of how communication theories and practices can, at times, obscure rather than illuminate the dynamics of power and social change. The dystopian view of communication reflects concerns and anxieties that have arisen from mass communication, symbolizing the darker side of communication technology and its complex impact on society.

Dystopia of miscommunication

Jeremy England⁵⁹ has proposed the provocative idea that life exists because the law of increasing entropy drives matter to acquire lifelike physical properties. The theory suggests that life inherently arises as a function of the laws governing entropy, proposing that biological systems develop lifelike properties as a natural consequence of energy dispersion. Communication, like life, can be seen as a system optimized to capture and dissipate energy, but through the exchange of information. Traditional views attribute life's emergence to chance events within a primordial environment. In contrast, England's hypothesis posits that life's emergence is a predictable outcome of entropy's influence on matter, akin to rocks predictably rolling downhill due to gravity. Life distinguishes itself from non-living carbon compounds by its superior ability to capture and dissipate environmental energy. England's mathematical model, grounded in established physics, describes how atom groups, when driven by external energy sources like sunlight and surrounded by a heat bath such as an ocean, will reorganize to dissipate energy more efficiently over time, potentially leading to life-like attributes. England's hypothesis represents a pioneering intersection of thermodynamics and biology, suggesting that the characteristics of life are a predictable outcome of the laws of physics. This perspective offers a fresh lens through which to view biological emergence, challenging traditional notions of life's randomness and positioning it as an expected consequence of thermodynamic principles. As research progresses, these ideas either will find empirical support or prompt new theories, enriching our understanding of life's origins in the context of physical law. The theory that life arises from the law of increasing entropy can also be applied to human language, communication, and society, suggesting that all follow the same natural laws of entropy. Just as entropy drives physical systems toward disorder and energy dissipation, it similarly impacts human cultural systems, leading to a gradual breakdown of structure, including the utopian ideal

⁵⁹ *A new physics theory of life* by Katherine Taylor, *Quanta Magazine*. (2019) Available at: <https://www.quantamagazine.org/a-new-thermodynamics-theory-of-the-origin-of-life-20140122/> (Accessed: 20 August 2024).

of communication. In this view, language and communication evolve not toward perfect clarity but toward disorder. Language, like any system governed by entropy, becomes less structured and more chaotic over time. As words lose meaning, linguistic structures simplify, and cultural shifts render certain expressions obsolete, the system generates disorder. This is comparable to the physical entropy that drives biological systems to reorganize, as described in England's theory, where matter evolves to dissipate energy more efficiently. Language, in turn, disperses information across social networks, but as this process continues, it introduces gaps, ambiguities, and eventual breakdowns. This leads to the end of the utopia of communication—the idea that language could perfectly convey meaning and unite people becomes an illusion in the face of entropy. The constant evolution of language means that miscommunication, ambiguity, and eventual fragmentation are inevitable. Just as the rise of entropy in isolated systems leads to a loss of order, the rise of linguistic entropy leads to the loss of precise, shared meanings. Art, myths, literature, and poetic language can be seen as human attempts to resist or channel this entropic force. They encapsulate meaning, stabilize communication, and create symbolic structures that push back against the natural drift toward disorder. However, they are not immune to entropy themselves. Over time, these cultural forms, too, evolve, adapt, and eventually decay, giving way to new forms that continue the cycle. In conclusion, both life and language are governed by the same entropic laws, making disorder and decay inherent in their progression. The quest for a perfect, utopian communication system is ultimately thwarted by the very forces that shape the evolution of life itself. Entropy ensures that both biological and cultural systems—including human language—are in constant flux, inevitably leading to disorder, chaos, and transformation. Just as England suggests that matter organizes itself to dissipate energy effectively under the law of increasing entropy, one might argue that linguistic systems reorganize to dissipate information effectively across social networks. The “energy” in this analogy is information, and like energy, information tends to spread out unless constrained by societal norms or linguistic rules. However, just as entropy increases inevitably lead to the “heat death” or maximal entropy state in a physical system where no more useful work can be done, linguistic systems too can reach a point of maximal entropy where the language becomes overly simplified or homogenized, losing the richness of its vocabulary and structures. This state can diminish the language’s ability to describe the world comprehensively or express complex ideas effectively, leading to what could be considered the “heat death” of a language. In both theories—England's biophysical framework and the sociolinguistic concept of entropy—the drive towards increasing entropy underpins fundamental changes, whether in the emergence of life or the evolution of language. The notion that both life and language are underpinned by similar thermodynamic principles highlights a fascinating universality in how complex systems, whether biological or cultural, behave and evolve over time.

Evolution and complexity

The Assembly Theory⁶⁰ (AT), is a novel framework that redefines how we understand the emergence and evolution of complex systems, including objects, biological entities, and even language. The theory posits that complexity can be quantified by the “assembly index,” which

⁶⁰ Sharma, A., Czégel, D., Lachmann, M., Kempes, C.P., Walker, S.I. and Cronin, L. (2023). Assembly theory explains and quantifies selection and evolution. *Nature*, [online] pp.1–8. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06600-9>.

measures the minimum number of steps required to construct an object from its basic components. This concept extends beyond physical objects, applying to abstract constructs like language and mathematical theorems. The theory suggests that language, like any other complex system, evolves through a process of selection where simpler, more efficient forms are favored. Over time, this could lead to the "planned obsolescence" of certain linguistic structures or words as they are replaced by more streamlined alternatives that require fewer steps to convey the same meaning. As language evolves, older forms may become obsolete, similar to how outdated technologies are phased out. The application of Assembly Theory to language highlights how systemic miscommunication could arise from differences in the "assembly index" of linguistic constructs. If two speakers use language with different levels of complexity or steps, this could lead to misunderstandings, as the intended meaning may not be accurately reconstructed by the listener. The theory implies that reducing the assembly index could minimize miscommunication, making language more universally accessible. AT also provides insights into the origin of language by framing it as a complex system that evolved through selection processes. Just as physical objects and biological systems are shaped by their assembly history, language is seen as an emergent property influenced by historical and causal factors. The evolution of language, therefore, can be understood as a series of selected steps that optimized communication, making it a product of both historical contingency and the need for efficient information transfer. Simpler forms of communication, requiring fewer steps to produce and understand, would have been favored in early language development, with more complex structures emerging over time. Language, like biological systems, likely evolved through a form of selection, where efficient and easy-to-learn elements (those with lower assembly indexes) were more likely to survive and be passed down. Assembly Theory offers a unique perspective on the evolution and complexity of language, suggesting that it evolves through a process similar to natural selection, where simpler, more efficient forms gradually replace older, more complex ones. This evolution can lead to planned obsolescence and systemic miscommunication, with the origins of language rooted in the same principles that govern the formation of complex objects in nature. Assembly Theory and the Entropy of Language suggest that instead of a utopia of perfect communication, natural laws governing language and society lead us toward a dystopia of miscommunication. Both theories point to how systems—whether biological, social, or linguistic—evolve through processes that favor efficiency, yet these same processes introduce disorder over time. Assembly Theory posits that language evolves to minimize complexity, favoring simpler structures that require fewer steps to create and understand. However, as language adapts and simplifies to meet the demands of communication, it also loses nuance, precision, and clarity, contributing to greater entropy. Over time, this leads to a breakdown in shared meaning, where miscommunication and misunderstandings become more frequent. Similarly, the Entropy of Language, as explained through natural laws, implies that systems—such as life and language—move toward increasing disorder. In language, the drive to efficiently transmit information parallels the dissipation of energy in physical systems, but this very efficiency can lead to instability and fragmentation. Language, therefore, could be seen as a tool for organizing social interaction and managing cognitive load, helping humans dissipate social and informational energy through communication. Historical contingencies and social factors further shape language's evolution, making it more susceptible to breakdowns in communication. The dystopian outcome arises from this inevitable increase in entropy: language, once seen as a tool for cohesion and understanding, slowly deteriorates into

miscommunication as it becomes more generalized and simplified. This disorder reflects a fundamental law of both nature and society, where complexity emerges and evolves but ultimately gives way to chaos and unpredictability. Thus, the natural trajectory of language and society leads us not toward a utopian ideal of perfect communication, but toward a dystopian reality where miscommunication is inevitable due to the entropic forces at play.

Muqaddimah

Why do cities keep growing, languages die, and life accelerates? What is the connection between the fragility of language and the enduring power of human communities? According to Geoffrey West⁶¹, there are mechanisms behind the rise and fall of cities and corporations. But these cycles are connected with the ephemeral nature of the languages that accompany them. Like biological systems languages grow, expand, and eventually decay when their meaning becomes too diffuse. As languages get larger, their capacity to hold precise meaning diminishes, leading to a breakdown in what can be called "semantic equilibrium." Yet, just as cities persist through change, so do people. Even as languages die, human memory, culture, and the fundamental need for social trust remain, constantly giving birth to new, simpler, and more meaningful forms of communication. In this way, human beings adapt, reinvent language, and continue to thrive. West, a physicist and former president of the Santa Fe Institute, has long focused on the scalability of cities and the networks that allow them to grow. He draws parallels between biological systems, cities, and social organizations, all of which are complex adaptive systems. His research has revealed that cities follow certain universal scaling laws—laws that not only govern their growth but also their resilience. As cities grow larger, their "dimensionality" increases, allowing for more opportunities, more jobs, and more innovation. This is much like how languages, as they grow, initially foster innovation and creativity. But over time, just as corporations buckle under the weight of bureaucratic inefficiencies, languages too begin to collapse under their complexity, losing their ability to convey meaning effectively. The remarkable thing about big cities, West notes, is that they can support a great deal of diversity—even what is considered not normal or even "crazy" in small villages and tribes. This tolerance for difference is one of the reasons why cities survive and thrive. People bring innovation, fresh ideas, and adaptability. But the language used within a city, or an empire, does not enjoy the same robustness. As civilizations grow, the languages they use tend to become more complex, formal, and distanced from the lived experiences of ordinary people. They lose meaning, just as corporations lose their innovative edge as they scale and are consumed by bureaucracy. Languages, like corporations, become rigid, one-dimensional, and incapable of fostering creativity. This process of decay is inevitable in large, complex systems that cannot maintain their original flexibility. The innovation that once drove these languages or companies forward is replaced by administrative maintenance, and eventually, both lose the ability to serve their original purpose. They become relics of a prior time, unable to keep up with the faster pace of life that the West describes in cities. But why do cities persist? Because cities are people, and people are always creating new ways to communicate, new ways to understand each other, and new ways to build trust. Language, in this sense, is ephemeral, a tool that can be discarded when

⁶¹ Edge.org. (2024). WHY CITIES KEEP GROWING, CORPORATIONS AND PEOPLE ALWAYS DIE, AND LIFE GETS FASTER | Edge.org. [online] Available at: https://www.edge.org/conversation/geoffrey_west-why-cities-keep-growing-corporations-and-people-always-die-and-life-gets-faster [Accessed 12 Sep. 2024].

it no longer serves its purpose. What remains is the need for connection and the trust that holds society together. This echoes Ibn Khaldun's insights in "Muqaddimah", where he argues that the real glue of society is not language or knowledge, but trust in others and a sense of justice. Without trust, society collapses—whether that society is built around a decaying language or a dying corporation. The living cycle of a community is connected to the level of simplicity of its language. The inherent tendency toward ambiguity and doublespeak brings an end to mutual trust and sincerity in the group. As countries and empires grow, their languages become increasingly complex, losing their ability to convey personal meaning. Eventually, after a period of disorder, those languages are replaced by the simpler, more meaningful languages of smaller tribes or groups. A grand language that once carried the weight of an empire loses its meaning, just as Latin gave way to the Romance languages. These new languages, born from human necessity and direct communication, carry the cultural and social memories that allow communities and cities to continue, even as the empires that once ruled them fade away. What remains is the enduring human capacity to adapt, create new languages, and rebuild society based on simpler, more direct forms of communication. The language itself may die, but the people and the traditions they carry forward persist. In this sense, the survival of cities, like the survival of people, depends not on the language they use, but on the trust and social cohesion they can maintain. Language serves a purpose, but when it no longer fulfills its role in fostering credence and justice, it is replaced. People survive by creating new languages, and new ways of communicating that are simpler, more efficient, and more connected to the immediate needs of society. Geoffrey West points out that, as cities grow, life speeds up. People walk faster, innovation happens more rapidly, and the pace of communication accelerates. This increasing pace of life places even more pressure on the languages and systems we use to communicate. The faster meanings move, the more likely it is that old, complex languages will break down and be replaced by new, simpler ones. This process of linguistic renewal mirrors the cycles of innovation required to keep cities and civilizations from collapsing under their weight. Yet, this constant need for innovation is unsustainable in the long term. The faster life gets, the more quickly we must innovate to avoid collapse. Eventually, as West warns, the pace of innovation required becomes impossible to sustain. The solution, as always, is not in the systems themselves, but in the people who use them. New languages will emerge, new forms of trust will be built, and society will adapt—just as it always has. In the end, it is not language, companies, or even cities that hold the future. It is the people who live in them, the trust they build, and the justice they seek. Languages, like companies, may die, but human traditions, memories, and the fundamental need for connection survive. As West shows, cities endure because people endure, constantly reinventing the tools—languages, technologies, and systems—they need to live and thrive. The lesson here is clear: languages may be ephemeral, but people and the bonds of trust they create are what truly matter.

Inevitability of Miscommunication

An axiom, postulate, or assumption represents a statement accepted as true without requiring proof, serving as a foundational premise for further reasoning and discussions. Originating from the Ancient Greek ἀξίωμα (axiōma), the term signifies "that which is deemed worthy or fit" or "that which presents itself as self-evident." A miscommunication axiom would serve as a foundational truth about how communication can inherently fail or lead to misunderstanding, much like Paul Watzlawick's axioms highlight the complexities of human interaction. Such an axiom would assert that miscommunication is inevitable due to the inherent

complexity of language, context, and perception. Even the simplest exchanges can be interpreted in multiple ways, influenced by factors like individual experiences, emotional states, or cultural contexts. The dystopia of miscommunication has become an unavoidable reality of human life in civilization, starkly contrasting with the long-held utopian belief that communication can bridge all gaps and foster perfect understanding. For years, researchers have envisioned communication as a powerful tool for connection, believing that with the right methods, human interaction could transcend misunderstandings and bring about unity and progress. This utopia of communication—where clear, seamless exchanges lead to social harmony—has been a guiding ideal in communication theory. However, life in sprawling urban environments and virtual realities exposes a different truth: Miscommunication is inevitable. In these vast, complex social networks, the sheer volume of interactions, coupled with diverse cultural, linguistic, and personal differences, makes perfect communication unattainable. The noise of city life, both literal and metaphorical, drowns out attempts at clarity. Messages are constantly distorted, misunderstood, or lost in translation as individuals interpret words, gestures, and silences through the lens of their own experiences and contexts. In this dystopia of miscommunication, even simple exchanges are fraught with the potential for misunderstanding. The foundational truth, or miscommunication axiom, is that human communication in large, fast-paced societies is naturally fragmented. Nonverbal cues often contradict spoken words, and the context that frames a message is rarely shared fully between individuals. The idea of shared understanding collapses under the weight of competing interpretations, emotional states, and cultural divides. This dystopian reality stands in sharp opposition to the utopia of communication imagined by scholars like Paul Watzlawick, where dialogue is seen as the path to resolving conflict and building trust. The dream of universal understanding falters when faced with the chaotic, ever-shifting nature of life in modern cities. In these environments, the complexity of human interaction leads to entropy in language—a breakdown of meaning where communication becomes less about clarity and more about survival during confusion. The dystopia of miscommunication teaches us that, rather than achieving perfect understanding, we must adapt to the chaos of urban communication. We must embrace the fact that miscommunication is part of the human condition, especially in large social systems, and focus on finding ways to navigate and mitigate its effects. In doing so, we accept that the idealized utopia of communication may never fully materialize, and instead, we must learn to thrive within the disorder of the communities and cities we inhabit. The five miscommunication axioms influenced by Paul Watzlawick would represent foundational truths about how communication inherently leads to misunderstandings and conflicts. These axioms outline the key processes through which human interaction breaks down, providing insight into why miscommunication is inevitable and how it can be managed:

1. Inevitability of Miscommunication

Miscommunication is unavoidable because communication occurs continuously, even without intention. Any behavior, inaction, or silence can convey unintended messages that are often misinterpreted.

2. Misalignment of Content and Context

Messages are always influenced by the context in which they are delivered. Miscommunication happens when the content of a message does not align with the relational or situational context, leading to misinterpretation.

3. Diverging Interpretations of Interaction Sequences

People often interpret the sequences of communication differently, punctuating interactions in ways that create a cyclical misunderstanding. What one person views as a cause, the other sees as an effect, leading to endless communication loops.

4. Conflict Between Verbal and Nonverbal Cues

Miscommunication arises when there is a mismatch between the digital (verbal) and analogic (nonverbal) components of communication. Discrepancies between what is said and how it is said cause confusion and conflict.

5. Imbalance of Power in Communication

Interactions can be either symmetrical (equal) or complementary (imbalanced). Miscommunication frequently occurs when power dynamics shift, either creating conflict in symmetrical relationships or exacerbating inequality in complementary ones.

These five miscommunication axioms reveal that misunderstanding is not an exception but a fundamental aspect of human interaction. Recognizing these axioms can help individuals navigate and mitigate miscommunication by being more conscious of how content, context, nonverbal cues, and power dynamics affect the exchange of meaning. Miscommunication is a pervasive issue in both personal and professional relationships, often arising from unconscious barriers and overlooked dynamics. Silence, often perceived as the absence of communication, is an active communicator, frequently conveying negative emotions or avoidance. Miscommunication occurs when silence is misinterpreted as neutrality or indifference, highlighting the fact that even when we think we are not communicating, we are still sending messages. Clarity is another essential factor. Ambiguity in messaging invites multiple interpretations, increasing the likelihood of misunderstanding. Without precision, the message can lose its intended meaning, leaving room for confusion and errors in interpretation. The relationship between communicators also profoundly affects how messages are received. A strained relationship can distort even neutral messages, turning simple exchanges into potential conflicts. This interplay of relationship dynamics often leads to miscommunication when emotional undercurrents are not addressed. In addition, nonverbal signals such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice can communicate just as much, if not more, than words. When nonverbal cues contradict verbal messages, the inconsistency causes confusion and misinterpretation. Assumptions also obstruct clear communication. Preconceived notions or biases cloud how messages are interpreted, often leading to distorted or incomplete understanding. In any exchange, it's important to approach the conversation with openness and avoid making assumptions about the other person's intent or perspective. Similarly, the context in which communication occurs—whether environmental, social, or emotional—shapes how messages are understood. Miscommunication happens when the context is not shared or explicitly acknowledged, leading to different interpretations of the same message. Emotional states can further distort messages. Strong emotions can cloud both the sender's and receiver's perceptions, causing reactions that are out of proportion or completely missing the point of the communication. Checking for emotional clarity before communicating can prevent unnecessary conflicts. In contrast, listening, or rather the failure to listen actively, is one of the primary causes of miscommunication. Often, people are more focused on formulating their response rather than fully understanding the speaker's message, which leads to missed or misunderstood information. Engaging in active listening—focusing on the speaker's words, providing feedback, and confirming understanding—is crucial to effective communication. Even inaction or avoidance communicates something, whether intended or not. Every behavior, gesture, or silence sends a

message, and miscommunication arises when these unintended messages are not addressed or acknowledged.

Punk Rhetoric

Punk is as much a cultural movement as it is a linguistic rebellion—one that embraces misunderstanding, miscommunication, and chaos. The rhetoric of punk is raw, stripped down, and unapologetically confrontational, reflecting its rejection of authority, nonconformity, and the polished promises of a bright future. Punk language doesn't seek clarity or resolution; instead, it thrives on disruption, disorder, and the breakdown of traditional communication norms. Its aim is not to build a utopia but to tell a dystopian, dark story of rebellion, alienation, and anger. Punk philosophy eschews the conventional drive for supremacy or superiority, embedding a deeper connection with the concept of planned obsolescence of language—deliberately designing products with a limited useful life. This ethos is mirrored in the punk movement's embrace of raw, unpolished energy over technical proficiency, and its celebration of the ephemeral over the enduring. The iconic riff of Led Zeppelin's "Communication Breakdown"—predating and influencing punk music—illustrates this transition. Jimmy Page, the guitarist, acknowledged their pioneering exploration into new musical expressions, which later bands like the Ramones would evolve into a defining punk characteristic. Malcolm McLaren, a pivotal figure in the punk scene, managed bands like the Sex Pistols and the New York Dolls, effectively sculpting the commercial punk archetype. His epitaph, "Better a spectacular failure, than a benign success," encapsulates punk's disdain for mediocrity and its embrace of bold, if not always successful, expressions. McLaren's influence was so profound that he has been likened to the Brian Epstein of punk, suggesting that without his flamboyant failures, punk might not have emerged as it did. Punk is not merely a form of protest but an act of sabotage against conventional success; it is made to break. Iggy Pop of the Stooges, often labeled the first "punk," described⁶² the term in an interview: "They used that term for me to represent the idea of someone who wants to do something very strong and very uncompromising, that believes in or has a vision of very badly, but at the same time he's the kind of person who doesn't have the skills or ability to do it." This leads to the idea of conspicuous obsolescence of punk—after reaching a peak in communication complexity of hard rock, there follows a deliberate simplification, a breakdown into simpler, less refined forms. This reflects a broader societal critique embedded in punk philosophy: a rejection of quality for quantity, a collapse of complex systems into more manageable, albeit less durable, forms. Punk, then, is both a musical genre and a philosophical critique of modern consumerist culture, emphasizing decay over growth, and impermanence over permanence. The rhetoric of punk is abrasive, deliberately chaotic, and challenges traditional speech. Punk bands and individuals use lyrics and slogans that provoke and confuse, critiquing political power, corporate greed, and societal oppression without offering clear solutions. Words become weapons of disarray, with phrases like "No Future," "Anarchy," and "Resist" encapsulating the punk spirit, painting a grim picture of society's collapse rather than a hopeful vision of what could come next. Punk's DIY

⁶² Whatley, J. (2020). Iggy Pop reveals why he's considered the Godfather of Punk. [online] Far Out Magazine. Available at: <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/iggy-pop-why-godfather-of-punk-rare-interview-1977/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CA%20the%20time%2C%20I%20was> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2024].

approach extends to its very language, where disorder and imperfection are embraced. Punks create their zines, flyers, and slogans in ways that are intentionally chaotic—misspelled words, rough grammar, and fragmented phrases are part of the aesthetic. The goal isn't clarity but a rejection of coherence. This broken-down rhetoric resists polished, commercialized language, celebrating the imperfection and chaos inherent in human expression. Punk's nonconformity doesn't just reject societal norms—it revels in linguistic disorder. The use of slang, blunt language, and shock value isn't just a means of communication; it's a way of ensuring that the message may be misheard, misinterpreted, or rejected entirely. Words are used to defy and alienate, not to unify or conform. Punk rhetoric thrives in the cracks of language, where confusion reigns and conventional meaning falls apart. Punk music, one of the primary vehicles for its rhetoric, is often deliberately unclear and chaotic. The lyrics are short, aggressive, and scattershot, reflecting the disorder of the world rather than offering coherent solutions. In this way, punk lyrics aren't meant to provide guidance but to reflect the dystopian reality of societal breakdown, war, and inequality. The simplicity of the language often belies the complexity of the issues, leaving room for misinterpretation and pushing the listener to confront their discomfort. Just as punk music is raw and unpolished, punk rhetoric is deliberately messy. It refuses the clean lines of formal communication, embracing profanity, fragmentation, and dissonance. This aesthetic disorder isn't a flaw but a feature—punk language is meant to destabilize, to disrupt any expectation of clarity or resolution. By rejecting polished rhetoric, punk emphasizes the chaos of reality and mocks the notion of a neatly organized world. Punk rhetoric fosters a community built on shared alienation and misunderstanding. The jargon, slang, and in-group language create a sense of solidarity among those who understand the codes, but it also excludes outsiders. This exclusion is part of the point—punk thrives on the tension between those who “get it” and those who are left out, underscoring its chaotic and confrontational nature. Even within its community, punk rhetoric tells a story of isolation and struggle, not of hopeful unity. The rhetoric of punk continues to shape countercultural movements, embracing miscommunication and disorder as essential elements of its message. Its language isn't designed to create a better world but to point out the dystopian realities of the current one. “No Future” is no promise of rebellion's triumph; it is an acknowledgment of chaos, a reflection of the uncertainty and disintegration at the heart of modern life. Punk's rhetorical rebellion isn't about crafting solutions or offering hope—it's about breaking down communication itself. Its language is a tool of disorder, revealing the cracks in society and refusing to promise a brighter tomorrow. Punk's rhetoric tells a dark, dystopian story, embracing the inevitable chaos of life, and challenging the notion that language should be a means to an end. Instead, punk uses language to create confusion, push boundaries, and highlight the disintegration of both societal structures and communication norms. Through this, punk asserts its identity as a voice of defiance, one that thrives in the disorder and embraces the bleakness of the present.

Resistant meaning-making

Punk rhetoric is a form of “resistant meaning-making”⁶³ and a radical critique of communication and cultural norms. Much like the Beat poets of the 1950s and the Hippie “Flower Power” movement of the late 1960s, punk arose as a counter-cultural force, challenging the prevailing societal constructs. Originating in Britain during the late 1970s, amid the rise of

⁶³ Winnsox.com. (2019). Punk: A Form of Resistant Meaning-Making. [online] Available at: <https://winnsox.com/blog/entry/punk-a-form-of-resistant-meaning-making> [Accessed 20 Sep. 2024].

Margaret Thatcher and the economic malaise following the OPEC oil crisis, punk became the voice of the disillusioned working class, expressing their disdain for the bleak economic conditions and the rigid conservatism of the "Iron Lady." Dick Hebdige's analysis of punk culture⁶⁴ begins with the symbolism of graffiti, which he describes as a way of asserting one's presence against the backdrop of the dominant culture—"Your presence on their Presence... hanging your alias on their scene." This notion of graffiti as resistant meaning-making extends to the punk subculture's appropriation of streets as dystopian spaces of miscommunication. These graffiti, inscriptions, slogans, and poetry transform the public space into a living, breathing critique of the status quo. Punk's rhetoric, which deliberately sought to offend and disturb, was a confrontation with the banalities of mainstream language. As Hebdige notes, the obnoxious, perverse, and abnormal were not just tolerated but celebrated, revealing the inherent absurdity of countercultural ideals that paradoxically became mainstream over time. Punk, in this light, is more than just a music genre or fashion statement; it is a critique of communication itself, exposing the waste and obsolescence inherent in conventional modes of expression. By embracing the impermanent and the provocative, punk forces us to confront the planned obsolescence not just of products, but of language, meaning, and the very systems of communication that shape our understanding of the world. In punk rhetoric, there is no assumption of passive consumption. Audiences are expected to misinterpret, misunderstand, or even reject the message entirely. This interaction is central to punk's disruptive nature—rather than delivering a clear, cohesive statement, punk media invites active miscommunication. This is not seen as a failure but as a core component of punk's strategy. By breaking down the traditional communication model, punk rhetoric forces the audience to grapple with the noise, creating a space where meaning is contested and reshaped by those willing to engage with it. Much like the idea that meaning is derived through interaction, punk rhetoric sees the audience's role as central to the creation of meaning, but in a more confrontational sense. When punk messages are cast into mainstream culture, they are often fragmented, intentionally provocative, and open to misinterpretation. The audience becomes complicit in this chaos, decoding messages within their own cultural and emotional contexts, often deriving meaning that was not explicitly intended. This interaction turns punk messages into cultural artifacts that reflect not consensus, but the very fragmentation and disorder they embrace. In the world of punk rhetoric, consumption of media is not a passive experience but a disruptive act. Punk messages are not delivered with the expectation of clarity or coherence but as acts of rebellion, where meaning is fluid and often chaotic. The audience is not a passive receiver but an active participant in the process of miscommunication, where the very act of decoding the message becomes a reflection of punk's anarchic resistance to structure and authority. Ultimately, punk rhetoric rejects the idea of the media as a controlled tool of elites, instead embracing its potential as a space for disorder, chaos, and misunderstanding. Through this lens, punk communication is less about conveying a single, unified message and more about disrupting the process of meaning-making itself, allowing for a myriad of interpretations and misinterpretations that fuel its anti-establishment ethos.

Deconstruction and authenticity

⁶⁴ Hebdige, D. (2012). *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Routledge.

The article "Postmodernism and Punk Subculture"⁶⁵ explores punk rhetoric as the intersection of "deconstruction and authenticity" within a postmodern framework. This countercultural movement, much like its predecessors, arose as a response to what is termed the "condition of postmodernity"—a crisis of meaning precipitated by the commodification of everyday life. In this context, punk offers two distinct, yet interconnected, responses: deconstruction and authenticity. The deconstruction within punk is deeply rooted in the postmodern ethos of irony, nihilism, and the rejection of fixed meaning. This approach mirrors the broader postmodernist trend of dismantling grand narratives and embracing localized, self-reflexive interpretations. Punk artists and subcultures, through a process of cultural recycling and parody, disrupt the dominant symbols and narratives that saturate social spaces. By repurposing cultural detritus—whether through fashion, music, or performance—punk exposes the inherent absurdity and fleeting nature of mass-mediated consumer culture. This deconstructionist approach is a critique of communication itself, highlighting how messages are often reduced to mere simulacra in a hyper-commercialized society. Conversely, the authenticity in punk seeks to reclaim sincerity and independence from the pervasive influence of the culture industry. This facet of punk is a direct response to the planned obsolescence of meaning in a postmodern world, where symbols and messages are rapidly commodified and stripped of their original intent. Punk's DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic embodies this quest for authenticity, creating a network of underground media and independent cultural production that resists the superficiality of mainstream culture. Here, the focus shifts from style to substance, emphasizing the creation of genuine artistic expression free from commercial exploitation. These two strands of punk—deconstruction and authenticity—may seem diametrically opposed, yet they are both reactions to the same socio-economic conditions. The deconstruction aligns with the transient, spectacle-driven nature of postmodern capitalism, where meaning is constantly destabilized and repackaged. Meanwhile, authenticity attempts to build resilient communities and sustainable modes of expression that stand in opposition to this cycle of obsolescence. Punk's engagement with these dual strategies reflects the broader challenges of postmodern society. On one hand, the deconstructionist impulse within punk offers a powerful critique of the commodification of culture, using irony and parody to expose the emptiness of consumerist narratives. However, this approach risks becoming as ephemeral as the culture it critiques, lacking a utopian vision to guide its rebellion. In "Punk Philosophy as a Path to the Summits of Ethos,"⁶⁶ Vuk Uskoković contends that adopting a punk persona is an essential stage in an individual's ethical evolution. Punk, as a philosophy, challenges the established norms and critiques communication itself by embracing a form of creative destruction that aligns with the concept of planned obsolescence in communication. The essence of punk lies in its rejection of blind adherence to authority and its celebration of creative aspirations over technical mastery. This stance is exemplified by the minimalist ethos of punk music, which dismantles the complex structures of progressive rock in favor of raw, straightforward expression. Uskoković argues that this simplicity, much like the

⁶⁵ MOORE, R. (2004). Postmodernism and Punk Subculture: Cultures of Authenticity and Deconstruction. *The Communication Review*, [online] 7(3), pp.305–327. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490492238>.

⁶⁶ Vuk Uskoković (2016). Punk Philosophy as a Path to the Summits of Ethos. [online] Chapman University Digital Commons. Available at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/pharmacy_articles/339/ [Accessed 20 Sep. 2024].

elegant minimalism found in fundamental scientific equations, underscores the punk ideal: it is not what one does, but the aspirations behind those actions that matter. The fervor to challenge and change the world infuses punk art with a timeless vitality, making it resonate even when stripped of technical sophistication. Punk's relationship with language is particularly subversive. Uskoković suggests that punk philosophy demands the destruction of language as we know it, to break free from its limitations and allow for the emergence of new, more vibrant forms of expression. This linguistic annihilation serves as a metaphor for the broader punk ethos—destroying the old to make way for the new, an act of self-annihilation that mirrors the seed's necessary death to bring forth new life.

Destruction of language

The punk's destruction of language parallels critique of communication. In a world where information is often commodified and reduced to waste, punk advocates for a radical departure from conventional discourse. By breaking the rules of clichéd communication, punk seeks to transcend language, using it as a tool for its deconstruction, thus paving the way for a more direct and profound engagement with reality. By walking the punk path, we are invited to ascend to the summits of ethos, where the interplay of freedom and constraint, creation and destruction, yields a richer, more vibrant understanding of our place in the world. Punk rhetoric serves as a way of revealing harsh truths about perversions of power and getting away with it. It can be compared to the role of the jester or satirist in the past. Historically, the court jester had a unique position: they were allowed, and often expected, to mock the powerful, speak uncomfortable truths, and expose the absurdities of the ruling class and society at large. Because they occupied the role of the "fool," they could tell the truth in ways that others couldn't, often masking sharp critiques of power behind humor, absurdity, and seemingly nonsensical behavior. This allowed the jester to "get away with it" because their mockery was framed as entertainment rather than direct rebellion. Punk rhetoric operates in a similar fashion. It uses chaos, absurdity, and the rawness of expression to challenge authority and societal norms. Much like the jester, punk is disruptive—it rejects the polished, structured, and sanctioned modes of communication, instead embracing disorder, simplicity, and rebellion. This makes its critique of power subversive, as it often uses the language of the irrational or the extreme to expose the perversions of power. Both jester satire and punk poetics serve to peel back the facade of power by playing the role of the outsider, embracing a "foolish" or chaotic perspective to speak truth without facing the same repercussions others might. They thrive on the tension between freedom and constraint, creation and destruction, offering a critique that is both playful and deadly serious. Just as Erasmus's "Praise of Folly" uses satire to criticize societal and institutional madness, punk adopts a similarly irreverent stance to expose the absurdity and corruption in the world. Erasmus's work is about the celebration of human folly as a form of truth-telling—foolishness, when examined closely, reveals the underlying madness of authority, religion, and politics. Punk does this too, but through chaos, simplicity, and subversion. Punk's destruction of language reflects a rejection of the systems that control how we communicate, think, and act. In a world of commodified communication and institutional madness, punk embraces the "folly" of dismantling traditional forms, much like Erasmus's critique of intellectual and moral blindness. Punk's minimalism and rejection of technical sophistication symbolize a rejection of elitist hierarchies, much like "Praise of Folly" mocks the learned scholars and hypocritical priests of Erasmus's time. Thus, "playing the fool" becomes a way of telling the "awful truth" about the world's dysfunction, doing so through absurdity, aggression, and raw simplicity—challenging power while getting

away with it by embracing its own brand of madness. In the words of Carl Jung, “The soul demands your folly; not your wisdom.” By adapting to the “stupidity and madness” of the world, “The Fool” makes its critique all the more potent, as it speaks from within the chaos it critiques, much like Erasmus's use of folly to highlight deeper truths. The Miscommunication Axiom is—“An increase in population and linguistic complexity can lead to greater misunderstanding and semantic entropy, potentially amplifying confusion and reducing effective communication.”

5. Language of Wisdom and Folly

Erasmus's Wisdom

In “Praise of Folly”, originally penned in Latin by Desiderius Erasmus in 1509, stands as a masterful satire that spirals through the folly inherent in all aspects of human life. Rooted in the intellectual traditions of the Renaissance, the work critiques the absurdity of human wisdom and the futility of communication, echoing the critique of language. The essay begins with Folly herself delivering a mock encomium, praising her virtues in a tone reminiscent of Lucian's satirical works. As the narrative unfolds, Folly extols self-deception and madness, turning her critique towards the superstitious abuses of Catholic doctrine and the corrupt practices within the Roman Catholic Church. Erasmus, ever the faithful critic, infuses Folly's voice with his disillusionment, especially after his disappointing experience in Rome. The work culminates in a stark declaration of the Christian ideal: “No Man is wise at all Times, or is without his blind Side.” Erasmus employs classical allusions and a style typical of Renaissance humanists to elevate Folly to a metaphysical level, where she embodies the vitality and absurdity of life itself. She is depicted as a goddess, the progeny of Plutus (the god of wealth) and Youth, nurtured by the nymphs Inebriation and Ignorance. Her companions—self-love, flattery, forgetfulness, laziness, pleasure, dementia, wantonness, intemperance, and heavy sleep—represent the various facets of human folly that, according to Erasmus, make life bearable and even delightful. Folly asserts with pompous confidence that nothing fortunate or frolicsome in life exists without her influence. Erasmus's critique aligns with a broader philosophical commentary on the limitations of human wisdom and language. Erasmus elevates folly to a metaphysical realm, challenging the stoic wisdom of scholasticism, the humanist obsession with learning, and the pursuit of apatheia—a detachment from emotions. For Erasmus, folly is not merely a human weakness but the very essence of life's splendor, love, youth, and the playful, gratuitous aspects of existence. The thesis of Erasmus's satire suggests that foolishness brings happiness and productivity, while excessive wisdom leads to pain, depression, and diminished creativity. In this light, Erasmus critiques the pursuit of knowledge as an exercise in futility, a waste of intellectual effort that only serves to complicate and obscure the simplicity of life. He argues that sciences and learning, which were initially intended to compensate for human deficiencies, have become tools of self-destruction, invented by the “old devil Theuth” to mislead humanity away from true happiness. Erasmus's disdain for the overvaluation of knowledge and learning reflects a deeper critique of communication itself. He sees the rise of sciences and arts not as advancements but as the pests of mankind, born from the same source as all other evils. In a time when language was unified and communication was straightforward, there was no need for grammar, rhetoric, or laws—tools that have since become instruments of confusion and miscommunication. The golden age of simplicity and directness has been eroded by the complex, convoluted systems of knowledge that now

dominate human thought. This critique resonates with the idea of planned obsolescence in language. Just as products are designed to become outdated, language and communication have been manipulated and complicated to the point where they no longer serve their original purpose of conveying truth and understanding. Erasmus's satire reveals how the pursuit of wisdom, far from enlightening humanity, has led to a proliferation of meaningless information—a waste of intellectual energy that only deepens the folly of human existence. “In Praise of Folly” is not merely a satirical work but a profound commentary on the limitations of human wisdom, the futility of communication, and the planned obsolescence of language. Erasmus's wit and irony expose the absurdity of intellectual pursuits and remind us that true wisdom lies not in the accumulation of knowledge, but in the recognition of our inherent folly and the embrace of life's simple, unpretentious joys. “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.” What does 1 Corinthians 3:18 mean? It presents a profound paradox: to become truly wise, one must first embrace what the world considers foolish. This idea challenges the conventional wisdom of any era, which often equates knowledge with power and status. A warning against the allure of being seen as wise by worldly standards, emphasizing that such wisdom is inherently limited, bound by the material and observable, and unable to access spiritual truths. True wisdom comes from a willingness to appear foolish in the eyes of the world to receive deeper insights. This notion of embracing foolishness to reveal truth has parallels in various forms of social critique throughout history. Satire, for example, has long been a means of using humor and absurdity to expose the flaws and corruption of authority. By presenting the world in exaggerated, distorted ways, satire reveals uncomfortable truths that might be too dangerous or unpopular to express directly. Similarly, those who challenge the limits of language and communication often use disruption and chaos to expose the deeper perversions of power and control. By stepping outside the conventional forms of discourse, they can critique the systems that those forms of language uphold. Language itself can become a tool of control, reinforcing the structures of power and limiting what is possible to think and express. When someone chooses to reject these constraints—by speaking in ways that seem irrational or absurd—they are, in effect, embracing the “foolishness”. This rejection of conventional wisdom and language allows for a more direct engagement with reality, one that is not constrained by the superficial norms of society. It is through this apparent folly that deeper truths can be accessed, truths that challenge the very foundations of worldly power and wisdom. In both 1 Corinthians 3:18 and in various forms of critique, the limits of language represent the limits of human understanding and worldly wisdom. By embracing what appears to be foolish—whether it be chaotic speech, subversive humor, or a willingness to be seen as irrational—individuals open themselves up to a greater, more profound wisdom that transcends the superficial and material. This form of wisdom, which often appears nonsensical to the world, ultimately leads to a more authentic understanding of truth, justice, and our place in the world.

The Psychology of The Fool

Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz explores⁶⁷ the psychology of the fool archetype, delving beyond the concept of the inferior function in Jungian psychology to uncover

⁶⁷ Eternalised (2023). The Psychology of The Fool. [online] Eternalised. Available at: <https://eternalisedofficial.com/2023/05/25/the-psychology-of-the-fool/>.

its deeper symbolic significance. The fool, in her view, represents more than just the undeveloped or least conscious aspect of the psyche—he embodies a profound archetypal force that resonates with the very essence of human nature and spirituality. The fool symbolizes a part of the human personality that has been left behind in the march toward rationality and order. This part retains the original wholeness of nature, untouched by the layers of civilization and intellect that have accrued over time. In this sense, the fool is a guardian of the primordial essence, a reminder of the unity and spontaneity that characterized early humanity before the advent of complex social structures and the compartmentalization of the psyche. The fool's role as an archetypal religious figure suggests that he functions as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious realms, linking the individual with the greater mysteries of existence. His presence in mythology, particularly as the fourth in a group of four, indicates his function as a mirror of the inferior function. However, this mirroring is not merely a reflection of weakness or deficiency; rather, it reveals the hidden potential and transformative power inherent in the parts of ourselves that we often neglect or undervalue. In many mythological traditions, the fool is seen as a paradoxical figure—both wise and foolish, both sacred and profane. He operates outside the bounds of conventional morality and social norms, embodying a form of wisdom that is beyond the grasp of ordinary understanding. This wisdom is not based on logical reasoning or learned knowledge but on an intuitive connection to the deeper truths of life. The fool's actions often appear irrational or absurd to the uninitiated, but they carry a deeper significance that can only be appreciated by those who are attuned to the subtler currents of the psyche. From a psychological perspective, the fool represents the part of the self that is most resistant to societal conditioning and intellectualization. He is the embodiment of the spontaneous, playful, and irrational aspects of human nature that are often suppressed in the name of order and control. Yet, it is precisely these aspects that hold the key to psychological wholeness and integration. The fool's seemingly nonsensical behavior is, in fact, a manifestation of a deeper logic—one that is aligned with the unconscious and the archetypal forces that govern human life. In this light, the fool can be seen as a symbol of the planned obsolescence of language and communication. Just as the fool undermines the established norms and conventions of society, he also challenges the limitations of language as a means of conveying truth. Language, with its inherent structure and logic, is often inadequate to express the fullness of human experience, particularly the irrational and mystical dimensions that the fool embodies. The fool's "foolishness" is, therefore, a critique of the overreliance on rationality and verbal communication—a reminder that true wisdom often lies beyond words, in the realm of the unconscious and the archetypal. Moreover, the fool's connection to the inferior function highlights the idea that what we dismiss as "stupid" or "foolish" may be the very source of our creativity and aliveness. In a world increasingly dominated by information overload and the commodification of knowledge, the fool stands as a beacon of resistance, embodying the notion that not all knowledge is valuable and that sometimes, it is the very things we disregard that hold the most profound truths. The figure of the fool serves as a powerful symbol of the neglected aspects of the psyche and the critique of our overemphasis on rationality and communication. He embodies the wisdom that comes from embracing our inner contradictions and the parts of ourselves that are often marginalized or dismissed. The fool reminds us that true wisdom is not about accumulating knowledge or mastering language but about reconnecting with the original wholeness of nature and the deeper, often irrational, truths that lie at the core of our being. Stupidity, as a concept, encompasses a range of behaviors and

characteristics that reflect a deficiency in cognitive function, whether in speech, action, or thought.

Playing stupid

In the Romantic era, thinkers like William Blake began to reframe stupidity as a potential source of wisdom. Blake's famous assertion that "if the fool would persist in his folly, he would become wise" from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" reflects a belief that persistence in seemingly foolish actions can eventually lead to deeper understanding. The idea is that through persistence in what seems like foolishness, one can uncover a deeper wisdom. Blake implies that by pushing boundaries, rejecting conventional thinking, and embracing what society might dismiss as folly, an individual can break through the superficial layers of understanding and reach a higher, more authentic truth. In this sense, the fool is not foolish at all but is instead engaged in a process of discovery. By defying norms and persisting in what others might see as irrational or nonsensical, the fool navigates the complexities of life in a way that the so-called wise often cannot. Wisdom, according to Blake, is not found by conforming to the standards of the world but by daring to challenge them. In the end, the fool's journey through folly is transformative, revealing the limitations of conventional wisdom and the richness of deeper insight. The value of stupidity is recognized as essential for reconnecting with aspects of reality that our structured categories often exclude. Embracing stupidity can help us recapture the otherness of difference, breaking free from the confines of conventional thought. On the other hand, the societal impact of stupidity is profound and alarming. Walter B. Pitkin, in his book "A Short Introduction to the History of Stupidity" (1932), warns of its pervasive and destructive influence. He argues that stupidity is the ultimate social evil, exacerbated by the sheer number of people affected, the concentration of power in the hands of the more or less stupid, and the dangerous combination of high abilities with serious stupidity. In summary, stupidity is not merely a lack of intelligence or ignorance but a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that can manifest as a deliberate resistance to adaptation, a strategic social ploy, or an intellectual strategy. Its impact on society is both pervasive and insidious, challenging our ability to communicate effectively and adapt to new realities. In a world increasingly saturated with information and communication, the critique of stupidity—and the linguistic systems that perpetuate it—remains an urgent task. Stupidity can be a deliberate, informed mentality that is maladaptive actions consciously taken against one's rationality. This definition distinguishes stupidity from mere ignorance by emphasizing that stupidity involves a choice, not a forced or accidental act and that it actively resists adaptation to new information or circumstances. The phenomenon of "playing stupid" is another intriguing aspect of this condition. Individuals can deliberately downplay their abilities, lowering others' expectations and evading responsibility. This tactic, while appearing foolish on the surface, can be a cunning strategy to avoid pressure and obligations, with the "stupid" individual often performing admirably when truly tested. The intellectual dimension of stupidity is equally significant. What is often labeled as feeble-mindedness can, in reality, be a form of pseudo-stupidity, a mental block caused by emotional inhibitions? In this context, people may "play stupid" in situations where understanding would provoke anxiety or guilt, thereby protecting a fragile psychological equilibrium. Conspicuous stupidity is a kind of shallow display of cleverness that, detached from real-world experience, leads to a superficial and ultimately foolish form of reasoning.

Le leggi della stupidità umana

In his provocative essay⁶⁸, "The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity" ("Le leggi fondamentali della stupidità umana," 1976), Carlo M. Cipolla delves into the intricate and often overlooked domain of human stupidity, offering a stark critique of its pervasive influence. Cipolla articulates five foundational laws that encapsulate the essence of stupidity, underscoring its insidious and omnipresent nature: 1. "The Inescapable Underestimation": It is a universal and unavoidable truth that individuals consistently underestimate the sheer number of stupid people that exist within any given population. 2. "The Equality of Stupidity": The likelihood of any individual being stupid is entirely independent of any other characteristic or attribute they may possess, whether it be intelligence, education, or social status. 3. "The Destructive Nature of Stupidity": A truly stupid person is one who causes harm or loss to another person or group while deriving no benefit themselves and possibly even suffering losses in the process. 4. "The Peril of Underestimation": Those who are not stupid frequently fail to appreciate the destructive potential of stupid individuals. They forget, to their detriment, that engaging or associating with stupidity invariably results in significant costs, regardless of the context. 5. "The Supreme Danger of Stupidity": The most dangerous person is, unequivocally, the stupid person, who poses a greater threat than even the most malicious pillager. These laws, particularly the third, illustrate Cipolla's conceptual framework for understanding human behavior through the lens of benefits and losses. He categorizes individuals into four distinct groups based on their impact on themselves and society: - "Helpless Individuals": These people contribute positively to society but are exploited, often resulting in a net loss for themselves. - "Intelligent Individuals": They manage to benefit both society and themselves, achieving a balance that leverages their contributions for personal and communal gain. - "Stupid Individuals": Their actions are counterproductive, harming both themselves and others, leading to a net detriment to society. - "Bandits": These individuals pursue their self-interest, often at the expense of societal welfare, although the extent of the damage they cause can vary. Cipolla further refines the categories of "bandits" and "naive individuals" by considering the net effect of their actions on societal welfare. For example, a bandit may enrich himself to varying degrees while impoverishing society and a naive individual may either contribute positively to society at their own expense or allow themselves to be exploited. Those who are naive or semi-stupid—engage in behaviors that ultimately result in a net drain on societal welfare. In contrast, some bandits, particularly sociopaths, psychopaths, and those driven by amoral self-interest, act with full awareness of the negative consequences their actions impose on society yet remain indifferent to these outcomes. Cipolla's exploration reveals a grim reality: stupidity, as a force within human affairs, is not just a benign flaw but a potent and pervasive danger. It transcends mere ignorance, manifesting as a willful and often unconscious resistance to adaptation and progress. Through this lens, stupidity becomes not merely a personal failing but a systemic issue, exacerbated by the structures of communication and societal organization that allow it to proliferate unchecked. This understanding invites a deeper critique of how information, or the lack thereof, contributes to the planned obsolescence of language and thought, perpetuating cycles of waste and inefficiency in human interactions and decision-making. In the end, Cipolla's analysis of human stupidity suggests that both intelligent individuals and bandits face a unique paradox: the best strategy for survival and success may be to "play stupid." For the

⁶⁸ Cipolla, C.M. (2011). The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity.

intelligent, playing stupid can serve as a defense mechanism, allowing them to navigate a world rife with irrationality without drawing attention or provoking conflict. By blending in with the status quo, they avoid the dangers posed by truly stupid individuals, whose destructive potential Cipolla warns against. Similarly, for bandits—those who seek to exploit others for personal gain—pretending to be less aware or capable can serve as a cunning strategy. It allows them to act without arousing suspicion, making it easier to manipulate situations to their advantage while minimizing the risk of backlash. Ultimately, in a world where stupidity is both omnipresent and dangerous, blending in with collective miscommunication and confusion may offer a form of protection. In a society where stupidity often holds sway, those who can tactically "play dumb" can navigate the chaos more effectively, avoiding the direct costs of confronting stupidity head-on. This paradox reinforces Cipolla's central thesis: that stupidity is not merely an individual trait but a pervasive force that shapes human interaction in subtle, often destructive ways. For those aware of its power, playing along may be the wisest, and perhaps the safest, course of action. In the end, it looks like "if the fool would persist in his folly, he would win any argument".

Collective stupidity

The destiny of those who oppose the power of collective stupidity is often fraught with frustration, isolation, and, in many cases, resistance from the very groups they seek to enlighten. Collective stupidity, as a powerful social force, thrives on conformity, miscommunication, and the suppression of critical thought. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reflections on the nature of stupidity reveal it as a far more insidious threat to society than malice. While evil can be confronted, exposed, and resisted, stupidity presents a unique challenge: it is impervious to reason and immune to argument. This concept, rooted in Bonhoeffer's letters from prison⁶⁹, serves as a stark warning to any society where certain individuals or groups accumulate excessive power. During the darkest period of German history, when innocent lives were destroyed by incited mobs, Bonhoeffer—a young pastor who boldly spoke out against these atrocities—was ultimately imprisoned. It was there, in the confines of his cell, that he pondered how his once-enlightened nation had descended into a collective of cowards, criminals, and opportunists. His conclusion was unsettling: the root of this transformation was not mere malice, but a pervasive and dangerous stupidity. Bonhoeffer argued that stupidity is not merely an intellectual deficiency but a moral one. It is a condition that infects individuals, not because they lack intelligence, but because they surrender their autonomy and critical thinking in the face of overwhelming power. This surrender creates a society where individuals become conduits for empty slogans and mindless catchphrases, losing their independence and becoming instruments of evil without even recognizing it. In essence, stupidity is not an inherent trait but a condition that people allow themselves to be subjected to, particularly in the context of social groups or under the influence of political or religious power. Stupidity is a choice, a linguistic affectation. This is not a failure of intellect per se but a failure of will and autonomy, where individuals relinquish their capacity for independent thought in exchange for the comfort of conformity and the illusion of belonging. This condition is exacerbated in large groups, where the complexity of language and the scale of the environment contribute to a collective dumbing down. In such settings, individuals are expected to shed their identities and embrace freedom from

⁶⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer (2010). *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Fortress Press.

responsibility that descends into madness. The crowd, as Bonhoeffer observed, tends to level itself to the lowest common denominator, creating a symphony of folly where stupidity reigns supreme. The creation of a mass society, Bonhoeffer implies, is inherently tied to the propagation of stupidity. In such a society, language becomes a tool not for enlightenment but for maintaining the status quo—an equilibrium of semantic emptiness. Stupidity, in this context, is not a lack of knowledge but a willful rejection of wisdom, a deliberate choice to remain ignorant. It is a complex, self-perpetuating cycle where education and communication become vehicles for sustaining mediocrity rather than fostering true understanding. Bonhoeffer's insight into the nature of stupidity is a critique of how communication can be weaponized to create and maintain power structures that thrive on the suppression of individual thought. It highlights the planned obsolescence of language, where words are stripped of meaning and used to manipulate rather than to enlighten. In such a world, playing stupid becomes a principle of power, a means to control and manipulate the masses. The tragic irony of Bonhoeffer's life—executed for his involvement in a plot against Hitler—underscores his warning: a society that fails to recognize and resist the dangers of collective stupidity is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. His words serve as a reminder that true freedom and responsibility lie not in the abandonment of thought, but in the relentless pursuit of wisdom, even in the face of overwhelming stupidity.

Predictably irrational

The phenomenon of mass psychosis⁷⁰, where entire populations can become delusional and detached from reality, can be described as a form of collective stupidity. This type of collective madness often stems from extreme fear, manipulation, or propaganda. Mass psychosis can be triggered by a combination of social, political, and psychological factors, often amplified by propaganda and monopoly of media and knowledge production. It emphasizes that delusional thinking becomes normalized as the population collectively adopts irrational beliefs, creating a distorted perception of reality. Escaping from this cycle requires a return to reason and critical thinking, as well as the courage to stand against the delusional mainstream narrative. This concept connects to the idea that individuals, when caught in such a psychosis, are not simply ignorant but may consciously choose to embrace falsehoods because it benefits them—whether socially, politically, or economically. In this way, mass psychosis acts like “societal stupidity” where individuals perform roles and adopt beliefs that serve their interests, even if they are irrational or destructive. When mass communication channels like the corporate media or government-controlled outlets disseminate fear, propaganda, or misleading information, they shape a distorted narrative that people begin to accept as reality. This form of miscommunication isn't just the spread of ideas; it's a method of conditioning. Repetition of key phrases, slogans, or ideologies through speeches, advertisements, and broadcasts normalizes irrational beliefs. Over time, this language creates an echo chamber where alternative views are suppressed, and those who question the dominant narrative are marginalized. In such environments, individuals start to conform not out of belief, but out of fear or the desire to belong. Language, in this context, becomes a tool not for conveying truth, but for reinforcing collective delusion. Much like George Orwell's concept of “Newspeak” in “1984”, the simplification and manipulation of language limits the ability of individuals to think

⁷⁰ [www.youtube.com. \(n.d.\). MASS PSYCHOSIS - How an Entire Population Becomes MENTALLY ILL.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09maaUaRT4M) [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09maaUaRT4M>./[Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].

critically or dissent. As a result, a population under mass psychosis speaks and thinks in predetermined, narrow patterns, often detached from reality. Mass psychosis, as the video suggests, can be reversed or avoided through the promotion of open discourse, critical thinking, and media literacy. Encouraging individuals to recognize manipulative language and seek diverse perspectives helps break the cycle of delusion. Thus, language, when used effectively, has the potential to either enslave or liberate the mind, depending on how it is communicated and received in society. Yes, those who control and manipulate the masses through language and propaganda can also fall victim to their methods, leading to collective stupidity. In the pursuit of power, they create a system where critical thinking is suppressed and only conformity is rewarded. Over time, the leaders themselves may start to believe in the very fabrications they spread, losing the ability to see beyond their propaganda. This results in a feedback loop of ignorance and irrationality that affects the entire system, from the masses to the elite. This collapse can indeed act as a "natural safe trigger" or "cultural kill switch". When a system built on mass delusion grows too rigid, unable to adapt or self-correct, it becomes fragile and eventually breaks down under its weight. This is a form of self-destruction, where the very tools used to control (language, communication, and propaganda) erode the system from within. As those in power surround themselves with yes-men and reinforce their distorted reality, they fail to recognize or address real problems, leading to inevitable collapse. In this way, mass psychosis and the stupidity that ensues may serve as a kind of safeguard against unchecked power, as no system can sustain itself indefinitely on delusion and manipulation. Eventually, reality asserts itself, and the inability of leaders and the public to deal with it leads to the system's downfall. In "Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions," Dan Ariely⁷¹ explores how the irrationality of human decision-making often stems from psychological and social influences, which can be seen as part of a broader "language of stupidity." Much like the miscommunications, misunderstandings, and absurdities we experience in everyday language, the decisions people make are often driven by forces that lead to irrational and seemingly "stupid" outcomes. Ariely's work challenges the classical notion of rational economic behavior, instead showing that people frequently make irrational decisions based on cognitive biases, emotional reactions, and flawed reasoning. This irrationality isn't random but "predictable"—people tend to make the same errors repeatedly, which speaks to the structured nature of our irrational behaviors. For instance, people behave irrationally when something is offered for free. This mirrors the linguistic absurdity of how people often gravitate toward "empty" words, or meaningless jargon, just because they seem appealing. Similarly, "anchoring"—the way people fixate on an initial piece of information, like a price point or a suggested value—can be compared to how individuals latch onto particular words or ideas without critical analysis, leading to misunderstandings or poor decision-making. Ariely also delves into "social norms" and how they shape irrational behaviors, which can be linked to how language and societal expectations often trap people into patterns of communication that perpetuate confusion or false beliefs. This is akin to the "stupidity" that arises when people act irrationally simply to conform to group behavior, much like how language can become nonsensical when driven by social pressures rather than clarity or logic. In short, Ariely's exploration of human decision-making reflects the broader "language of stupidity" in which irrationality is not just an occasional error, but a predictable and structured part of how humans

⁷¹ Ariely, D. (2008). *Predictably irrational : the hidden forces that shape our decisions*. New York: Harper.

think and behave. Understanding these forces can help us navigate both our decisions and the ways we communicate, highlighting the intricate connections between irrationality and the complexities of language.

Power of Stupidity

Does collective behavior lead to collective intelligence or stupidity?⁷² Are we, as a collective, ensnared in a cycle of stupidity, or is there a path to collective intelligence? This question lies at the heart of understanding how group behavior influences our decisions, for better or worse. Jens Krause, a leading researcher from Humboldt University, Berlin, delves into this paradox in his study of collective behavior. His insights reveal the dual potential of group dynamics to either elevate or diminish our collective decision-making. Drawing parallels between the synchronized movements of birds in flight or fish in a school, Krause emphasizes how our behavior is often unconsciously swayed by those around us. However, unlike these animals, human collective behavior doesn't always lead to intelligence. It can just as easily descend into collective stupidity. When waiting at a crosswalk, we are twice as likely to cross against a red light if someone next to us begins to cross first. This behavior illustrates how easily collective actions can lead us astray. In this case, the influence of another's poor decision can override our judgment, leading to dangerous and irrational behavior. Krause's research underscores that collective behavior has the potential to foster both intelligence and stupidity. In some scenarios, groups can indeed make better decisions than any individual could alone. However, this only holds true under specific conditions: when individuals possess a basic level of understanding, when they are honest in their decision-making, and when there is sufficient diversity in thought to avoid correlated errors. Without these conditions, collective behavior can amplify errors and lead to disastrous outcomes. In sum, the study of collective behavior reveals a delicate balance between intelligence and stupidity. While groups have the potential to make smarter decisions than individuals, this potential is contingent upon various factors that, if misaligned, can lead to collective folly. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for harnessing the power of collective intelligence while mitigating the risks of collective stupidity. In his essay⁷³ "Collective Stupidity," Denny Gioia tackles the paradox of human intelligence—how we, as individuals, are capable of remarkable intellect, yet as a collective, often exhibit staggering folly. This discrepancy is especially glaring when considering our response to climate change, an existential threat that demands urgent and decisive action. Gioia's critique is a sobering reflection on how our collective behavior has been marked by a profound failure to act, despite overwhelming evidence of the impending crisis. Gioia begins by acknowledging that most rational individuals accept the reality and dangers of climate change. However, he notes a troubling disconnect: while individuals may understand the gravity of the situation, collective action has been woefully inadequate. This gap between individual awareness and collective inaction raises critical questions about why humanity, in the face of such an

⁷² Sainsburywellcome.org. (2021). Understanding how collective behaviour leads to collective intelligence or stupidity | Sainsbury Wellcome Centre. [online] Available at: <https://www.sainsburywellcome.org/web/qa/understanding-how-collective-behaviour-leads-collective-intelligence-or-stupidity> [Accessed 25 Aug. 2024].

⁷³ Gioia, D. (2023). Collective Stupidity. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 33(1), pp.92–93. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926231203846>.

existential threat, continues to behave so foolishly. One explanation is the persistence of outdated priorities, particularly within the business world. For too long, profit has been the primary concern, often at the expense of the planet's well-being. Even as environmental issues have gained prominence, many firms continue to prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. This narrow focus on profit is a form of collective stupidity that blinds us to the urgent need for action. Another factor contributing to this collective stupidity is the deliberate dissemination of misinformation by powerful industries. All industries have adopted similar tactics, sowing doubt and confusion about the reality to protect their interests. This calculated obfuscation undermines public understanding and delays necessary action, further entrenching collective inaction. It looks like there is a human tendency to avoid difficult truths and resist change. People are more inclined to dismiss slow-moving threats, like climate change, because they do not trigger immediate responses. This psychological inertia, coupled with corporate distractions and "whataboutism," leads to a dangerous complacency that perpetuates the status quo. The irony of human intelligence is that the most advanced species on Earth individually, are capable of repeatedly committing catastrophic errors collectively. Sooner or later people face the consequences of their failure to act wisely collectively, paying a steep price individually.

Why do smart people do stupid things in groups?

How does collective stupidity work? Why do smart people do stupid things in groups? Why functional stupidity can cause organizational collapse, financial meltdown, and technical disaster? "The Stupidity Paradox: The Power and Pitfalls of Functional Stupidity at Work"⁷⁴ by Mats Alvesson and André Spicer delves into a profound and often overlooked phenomenon within organizational life—functional stupidity. This concept explores how, within the intricate dance of corporate operations, seemingly intelligent individuals and organizations can engage in irrational and nonsensical behaviors that, while potentially beneficial in the short term, often lead to disastrous long-term consequences. The paradox of stupidity in the workplace lies in its dual nature. On one hand, a certain degree of functional stupidity can foster workplace harmony, streamline processes, and drive short-term success. It allows individuals to focus on their tasks without questioning the underlying purpose or potential consequences, thus avoiding conflict and promoting a smooth operational flow. However, this same ignorance, when left unchecked, can result in organizational collapse, financial ruin, and technological failures. This paradox is pervasive, influencing everything from the blind adoption of management fads to an overemphasis on superficial aspects like brand image. The book challenges the reader to question the "knowledge economy" myth—an idea that many organizations claim to be knowledge-intensive, yet their employees are often relegated to mundane, repetitive tasks. This disconnect between perception and reality highlights the superficiality that often underpins corporate practices. The dangers of mindless expertise arise when highly skilled professionals carry out their tasks on autopilot, lacking any engagement in critical thinking. This "skilled incompetence" can lead to stagnation, as individuals become resistant to change and new ideas, preferring the comfort of routine over the challenge of innovation. In his essay on stupidity,

⁷⁴ Mats Alvesson (2016). *The Stupidity Paradox : Why Smart People Don't Think at Work*. London: Profile Books.

Robert Musil argues that in order to comment on stupidity, one must not be stupid: "...the best place might be with the initial difficulty, which is that anyone who wants to talk about stupidity, or profitably participate in a conversation about it, must assume about himself that he is not stupid; and he also makes a show of considering himself clever, although doing so is generally considered a sign of stupidity!"⁷⁵ To comment on stupidity without embodying it is a paradoxical endeavor. To discuss stupidity presupposes intelligence, yet claiming intelligence risks lapsing into the very stupidity one critiques. This paradox suggests that stupidity is not merely an intellectual deficit but a complex social phenomenon that defies straightforward analysis. Stupidity, as Musil implies, often exists as the Other—a perceived threat to the intelligent, yet one that remains inscrutable and untouchable due to its inherent contradiction. Intelligence, in its quest to outmaneuver stupidity, may find itself ensnared by it, revealing that the true nature of stupidity is elusive and perhaps more powerful than we care to admit. In his exploration of stupidity, Musil candidly admits to a lack of a definitive theory that could potentially offer salvation to the world. Unlike goodness, beauty, or electricity—concepts that have long captured the intellectual pursuit—stupidity remains curiously neglected within the annals of scientific inquiry. Musil attributes this to either his own ignorance or, more likely, to the reality that the question "What is stupidity?" is as discordant with modern thought as the philosophical inquiries into the nature of goodness or beauty. Driven by the fundamental importance of this concept in daily life, Musil embarks on a quest to understand stupidity in its "real" form rather than its superficial manifestations—a task more aligned with his intellectual curiosity than his professional expertise. However, his approach is not scientific but elementary, rooted in an analysis of the world's common usage. Musil acknowledges the chaotic nature of this method, likening it to a lepidopterist's nightmare, where the pursuit of one specimen leads to confusion when another, seemingly similar, flutters into view. The family of words related to stupidity proves elusive, resisting easy classification and raising the question of whether their apparent connections are anything more than superficial resemblances. Musil begins his examination by confronting the initial paradox faced by anyone who dares to discuss stupidity: the assumption that they themselves are not stupid. The very act of asserting one's intelligence, he observes, is often considered a hallmark of stupidity. This paradox, rooted in a kind of ancestral wisdom, suggests that it has historically been more prudent not to appear intelligent, especially for those in weaker positions within society. In environments where strength disparities exist, it is often more intelligent for the weaker party to feign stupidity, as it disarms suspicion and defuses potential threats. This tactic of "playing dumb" is still observed in relationships of power and dependence—between peasants and landowners, servants and masters, soldiers and officers, students and teachers, and children and parents. In these contexts, stupidity serves as a shield, reducing the powerful to a state of frustration and thereby shifting the balance of power. Musil's reflections reveal that stupidity, far from being a simple lack of intelligence, is a complex social strategy, deeply embedded in the dynamics of power and survival. It is a concept that defies easy definition, its manifestations as varied as the situations in which it is deployed. The act of feigning stupidity, whether out of self-preservation or as a means to manipulate, illustrates the nuanced role that perceived foolishness can play in human interactions. In this light, Musil's essay is not just a critique of stupidity but a broader

⁷⁵ Robert Musil (2019). *On Stupidity* (translated from the German). [online] PN Review Blog. Available at: <https://pnreviewblog.wordpress.com/2019/10/21/on-stupidity-by-robert-musil-translated-from-the-german/> [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].

commentary on the intricacies of communication and the subtle language games that define human relationships.

Misunderstanding stupidity

Despite their methodical endeavors and controlled environments, scientists have struggled to meaningfully dissect and understand the elusive nature of human intelligence. In “Understanding Stupidity” by James F. Welles⁷⁶ "intelligence" is defined as the capacity to process information efficiently—specifically, the ability to relate data without distortion from dominant belief systems, or schemas. Ideally, the information should be assessed based on its intrinsic value and credibility, leading to the formulation of effective response strategies. The continuum of knowledge within a system ranges from agnosticism or ignorance (lack of data) to gnosis (possession of all relevant data). The efficiency of a system is then judged by its ability to achieve "appropriate" goals, whether those goals are consciously defined or subconsciously driven. The strategies deemed intelligent are those that align with an individual's skills and prove successful in solving problems. In a broader context, "intelligence" reflects the ability to apply a suitable schema that maximizes the likelihood of a successful outcome in a specific situation. However, due to the challenges psychologists face in defining intelligence operationally, they often resort to exploring the intricacies of "problem-solving" as a proxy. Problem-solving, which presumably indicates intelligence, involves several key steps: first, recognizing a situation as a problem; then, encoding the relevant facts into conceptual shorthand (words) for cognitive manipulation; integrating these facts to reflect functional relationships; breaking down the problem through dissociation; and finally, synthesizing a solution that enhances one's interaction with the environment. This structured approach to problem-solving contrasts starkly with the multifaceted nature of stupidity. On the most general level, stupidity arises when behavior is guided by an inappropriate schema due to a failure in problem perception. For instance, while the audience at a magic show sees the magician's challenge as pulling a rabbit out of a hat, the magician's true challenge lies in getting the rabbit into the hat—a perspective that the audience overlooks. Even when a problem is accurately identified and a relevant schema is applied, it can still be misapplied in numerous inventive ways. Information might be ignored altogether, or if noticed, it might be perceived inaccurately. Even if perceptions are accurate, they may be misinterpreted, disorganized, or manipulated ineffectively—either too little or too much—by an imagination that is either too weak or overly active. Poor language skills can exacerbate these issues, leading to sloppy symbol formation and clumsy conceptualization. Inattentiveness can cause confusion between unrelated events or an inability to recognize the connections between seemingly disparate occurrences. The behavioral response, too, may suffer—either untested or poorly tested, illogical and thus irrelevant, or excessively logical and therefore unappealing. In this light, "intelligent stupidity" emerges as a paradoxical phenomenon, where the capacity for intelligent thought is undermined by a variety of cognitive missteps, leading to outcomes that are anything but intelligent. The critique of this paradox invites us to examine not just the processes that enable effective problem-solving but also the myriad ways in which those processes can go awry, rendering intelligence functionally obsolete.

Language consists of flawed concepts

⁷⁶ Welles, J.F. (1987). Understanding Stupidity.

Is it possible that the myth of intelligence is damaging? What if “intelligence” is a stupid concept⁷⁷ asks Jordan De Silva in 2017. Have you ever doubted your intelligence, thinking it might be the reason you can’t achieve what others have? Research increasingly shows that our attitudes toward intelligence play a crucial role in our ability to reach our goals. One of the most pervasive myths is that the most successful individuals are inherently the most intelligent. This belief is not only misleading but also detrimental to personal growth. Many people fall back on the idea that failure is proof of a lack of intelligence, reinforcing the notion that they aren’t the smartest in the room. This perspective overlooks the reality that the stereotypical “intelligent person” often succeeds by persistently pushing through repeated failures. These individuals learn from their mistakes, adjusting their strategies until they achieve their desired outcomes. True intelligence, if it exists in any meaningful way, might be better understood as a particular attitude towards failure—seeing it as a valuable opportunity for reflection, learning, and renewed effort rather than a definitive endpoint. One of the most problematic aspects of modern education is its arbitrary division between “intelligent” and “non-intelligent” students. From a young age, we are led to believe that top performers are naturally gifted, and born with superior intelligence. However, this belief is a fallacy. In reality, high achievers often put in more effort or have developed more effective study habits. Some of the significant predictors of long-term academic success are motivation and study strategies, not inherent intelligence. This highlights the importance of recognizing the limitations of the traditional concept of intelligence. The notion of intelligence is fundamentally arbitrary. What does it truly mean to be intelligent? Intelligence can encompass a variety of traits, such as quick learning, critical thinking, creativity, wit, academic performance, and articulation. Interestingly, most people considered “intelligent” likely possess only one or two of these qualities, not all. This suggests that intelligence is not a monolithic trait but rather a collection of various abilities, each of which can be developed to some extent in everyone. Having deconstructed the idea of intelligence into specific characteristics, it becomes clear that no single, overarching concept of intelligence is responsible for success in studies or work. Environmental factors such as culture and upbringing influence IQ scores, making traditional measures of intelligence a poor reflection of innate intellectual abilities. Academic success, therefore, may stem more from learned behaviors and strategies than from inherent gifts. People who see intelligence as a fixed trait are less likely to challenge themselves and take on difficult tasks, fearing failure. However, studies show that those who believe intelligence is malleable are more likely to improve over time. Interestingly, individuals who are labeled as “gifted” or “smart” from a young age often avoid challenging situations to protect their reputation, a phenomenon known as the “big fish, small pond” effect. They fear public failure, which they equate with a public questioning of their intelligence. As a result, they limit themselves to less challenging environments where their intelligence goes untested. Modern measures of intelligence struggle to differentiate between inherent and acquired traits, leading to a flawed understanding of what it means to be smart. The most important lesson is to view intelligence as something malleable, and capable of growth. By adopting this mindset, you’re more likely to embrace challenges, step outside

⁷⁷ Jordan De Silva (2017). Why ‘intelligence’ is a stupid concept - Mission.org - Medium. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/the-mission/why-intelligence-is-a-stupid-concept-ed54d22d9084> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2024].

your comfort zone, and see failure not as a setback but as a necessary part of the learning journey. The exploration of stupidity across various contexts—from functional stupidity in organizations to the philosophical critiques of intelligence—reveals a common thread: stupidity is not merely an individual failing but a collective phenomenon that emerges and amplifies within large, complex linguistic groups. As these groups grow in size and their communication becomes more intricate, the potential for miscommunication, semantic entropy, and collective stupidity increases. Stupidity, as analyzed, often arises from the disconnect between individual cognitive capacities and the pressures of collective behavior. In large groups, the complexity of language and the proliferation of communication channels lead to a degradation of meaning, where the clarity and precision of ideas become diluted. This semantic entropy fosters environments where thoughtless conformity, misinterpretation, and the failure to critically engage with information thrive. The Miscommunication Axiom—"An increase in population and linguistic complexity can lead to greater misunderstanding and semantic entropy, potentially amplifying confusion and reducing effective communication."—captures this dynamic. As the number of communicators increases and language becomes more sophisticated, the likelihood of misunderstanding, oversimplification, and the spread of erroneous beliefs also rises. This is particularly evident in scenarios where collective decisions are made, such as in business, politics, and social movements, where the consequences of collective stupidity can be profound and far-reaching. Moreover, the interaction between power structures and collective stupidity further exacerbates this phenomenon. As power consolidates within certain groups or individuals, the influence of stupidity can become institutionalized, leading to widespread societal impacts. The examples of climate change denial, corporate misinformation, and the perpetuation of ineffective organizational practices illustrate how collective stupidity can undermine rational decision-making and hinder progress. In conclusion, stupidity is not merely an individual flaw but a natural and inevitable byproduct of complex social and linguistic systems. As human societies grow and their languages evolve, the challenge lies in mitigating the effects of collective stupidity by fostering environments that encourage critical thinking, clear communication, and the questioning of established norms. Only by addressing the root causes of semantic entropy and miscommunication can we hope to understand the prevalence of collective stupidity and its impact on society.

Theory of stupidity

What would a theory of collective stupidity⁷⁸ look like? In 2004 Geoff Mulgan answered his "Lemmings, Laziness, and Likes: A Theory of Collective Stupidity". Collective intelligence is the amplified capability arising from the synergy of individual minds, shaping the entirety of human civilization. Left to our own devices, our lives would likely be solitary and brief. However, this collective intelligence can also manifest in smaller contexts and can be quantified when groups solve problems more effectively than isolated individuals. Conversely, collective stupidity occurs when the aggregation of individual bits of intelligence results in poorer outcomes than if those individuals acted alone. This phenomenon is particularly evident when the self-interests of individuals culminate in detrimental collective outcomes, such as the

⁷⁸ Geoff Mulgan (2024). A theory of collective stupidity: laziness, likes and lemmings. [online]. Available at: <https://www.geoffmulgan.com/post/a-theory-of-collective-stupidity-laziness-likes-and-lemmings> [Accessed 25 Aug. 2024].

"tragedy of the commons." Understanding collective stupidity requires dissecting the failures in collective intelligence. Just as individual stupidity arises from errors in observation, interpretation, memory, or judgment, so too can collective stupidity. These failures can be observed in any group, organization, or society, where critical elements of intelligence, such as creativity, empathy, and wisdom, are imbalanced or ineffective. Collective stupidity often stems from an imbalance in the components of intelligence. For instance, an overemphasis on data collection without proper interpretation can lead to poor judgment. Similarly, clinging to outdated memories or models can result in catastrophic errors. These failures at the collective level mirror individual cognitive failures, where maintaining a balance between the elements of intelligence is crucial for effective action. A more profound cause of collective stupidity lies in the inability to establish and utilize learning loops—systems that recognize and adapt to new environments by revising cognitive frameworks. Collective stupidity emerges when errors go uncorrected, often due to weak feedback mechanisms. The persistence of collective stupidity can be attributed to several forces that obstruct error correction and adaptation. Two primary drivers of collective stupidity are the tendency to conserve cognitive energy and to seek positive social feedback. Intelligence requires significant energy and attention, leading us to default to easier, less taxing cognitive shortcuts. This conservation of energy manifests in routine behaviors that, while efficient for everyday tasks, hinder deeper, more reflective thinking necessary for complex problem-solving. Evolution has ingrained in us a strong tendency to form and commit to groups. However, this commitment can lead to collective stupidity when loyalty overrides critical thinking, suppressing necessary observation, interpretation, and judgment. Groups often develop strong identities that foster cooperation but can also blind them to reality. These identities, reinforced by symbols, rituals, and narratives, can outlast their usefulness and obstruct accurate perception and decision-making. Human suggestibility, while useful for learning and cooperation, can amplify errors in group settings. This tendency leads to bandwagon effects, where shared errors spread rapidly, creating collective delusions or panics. History is replete with examples of nations engaging in self-destructive behaviors—driven by groupthink, conformity, and an inability to process complex dynamics—that lead to national decline or collapse. Conformism, driven by the need for group coherence, often suppresses critical information and divergent thinking. This leads to collective blind spots, where groups fail to recognize or address significant errors. In essence, collective stupidity and the planned obsolescence of language are natural phenomena within large social groups. As language and communication become more complex, the potential for miscommunication and semantic entropy increases. However, these dynamics are not inherently negative; rather, they reflect the natural evolution of social and cognitive processes. By recognizing and addressing the factors that contribute to collective stupidity, we can better harness the power of collective intelligence for the benefit of society.

Babbling Ape

Koko the Talking Gorilla became a global sensation, largely due to her apparent ability to communicate using American Sign Language (ASL), sparking debates and emotional connections around the possibility of interspecies communication. Over the decades, Koko appeared in documentaries, books, and interviews, fueling the belief that she could express thoughts, emotions, and desires through signs, elevating her to a symbol of animal intelligence. The 1978 documentary "Koko: A Talking Gorilla" captured this, portraying her as a

breakthrough in understanding animal cognition. However, the scientific perspective on Koko and other apes trained in sign language, such as Nim Chimsky, has shifted dramatically. Critics argue that rather than engaging in genuine, creative language use, these apes were largely mimicking human handlers, responding to subtle cues rather than forming original thoughts. Herbert Terrace, one of the most prominent critics, concluded that much of what was perceived as language in these apes was actually behavior driven by conditioning. The signs Koko used were often requests for food, affection, or basic needs, not the complex, spontaneous communication we associate with human language. Herbert S. Terrace, a prominent critic of ape language studies, argued that Koko's apparent ability to use sign language was not as meaningful as many believed. In his article⁷⁹ "Why Koko Can't Talk: The Ape's Still Fooling Most of the People, Most of the Time," Terrace contends that Koko and other apes were not genuinely communicating through language but rather mimicking their handlers in exchange for rewards. According to Terrace, these apes were responding to subtle cues from their trainers rather than forming original, complex thoughts, which would suggest true linguistic ability. Terrace's skepticism is rooted in the idea that while Koko could use signs to make requests, such as asking for food or attention, these interactions were largely non-grammatical and lacked the creativity and structure seen in human language. Much of Koko's behavior, Terrace and others argued, was misinterpreted by well-meaning researchers who projected human traits onto the gorilla. Despite the emotional connection that Koko's story fostered around the world, particularly with her bonding moments like adopting a kitten, the scientific consensus has shifted toward the view that Koko's communication was not as groundbreaking as initially thought. It was more likely a result of conditioning rather than evidence of true linguistic comprehension. The reason why apes, like Koko, are "fooling most of the people, most of the time" lies less in the apes' abilities and more in human psychology—specifically, our deep desire to believe in animal intelligence and connection. As Herbert Terrace and other critics argue, the emotional appeal of projects like Koko's creates a powerful narrative: humans want to believe that animals, especially primates, can communicate in ways that mirror human language and emotion. This desire taps into a fundamental longing for connection across species, reflecting a broader human tendency to project intelligence, empathy, and other human traits onto animals. One key factor is anthropomorphism, the practice of attributing human characteristics to non-human entities. People are naturally inclined to see human-like behavior in animals, and the idea that animals can express themselves using human language is particularly compelling. Koko, for example, seemed to demonstrate emotions like affection and sadness, and her use of sign language, however simplistic, gave many the impression that she was communicating on a deeper level. These narratives are not only heartwarming but also affirm our desire to see ourselves in the natural world, blurring the lines between human and animal intelligence. Much of this belief stems from wishful thinking and a tendency to misinterpret the apes' conditioned responses as genuine linguistic communication. Rather than true language, what we often see in apes like Koko are highly trained behaviors, driven by rewards and guided by subtle cues from their handlers. In the end, people are "fooled" not because apes are tricking them intentionally, but because humans want to be fooled. The emotional and symbolic significance of bridging the gap between humans and animals leads

⁷⁹ Terrace, Herbert S (n.d.) Why Koko can't talk: The ape's still fooling most of the people, most of the time. *The Sciences*. [Online] 22 (9), 8–10.

many to overlook the scientific limitations of these studies, focusing instead on the heartwarming moments that reinforce our desire for connection.

Conversation with imposter

A 2015 article⁸⁰ from The Atlantic is called “A Conversation With Koko the Gorilla, An Afternoon Spent with the Famous Gorilla Who Knows Sign Language”, and the scientist who taught her how to “Talk”. The quote from the end of the article: “Allegations of selective interpretation have accompanied ape-language research from the beginning. Still, it was impossible to be there interacting with her, and not feel that I was in the presence of another self-conscious being,” this captures the profound emotional impact Koko had on those who interacted with her. Despite the scientific skepticism surrounding her ability to truly use language in the human sense, Koko’s interactions often left people feeling that they were in the presence of an intelligent, self-aware being. It reveals how deeply humans seek to recognize themselves in other creatures and how powerful those moments of apparent understanding can be, regardless of the scientific outcome. The 2022 article⁸¹ “Koko the Impostor: Ape Sign Language Was a Bunch of Babbling Nonsense” reinforces this skepticism. It suggests that the belief in Koko’s linguistic abilities was based more on human projection and a desire to see animals as capable of human-like communication than on rigorous scientific evidence. Researchers found that the grammar and structure of Koko’s “conversations” were inconsistent, and much of the interpretation was generous or selective. While her ability to use signs was remarkable in some respects, it was far from proof of language use as we understand it. The study of ape sign language, once seen as groundbreaking, is now largely discredited, with critics arguing that apes were simply mimicking their handlers rather than engaging in meaningful communication. Apes like Koko and Nim Chimsky appeared to sign words and phrases, but a closer analysis revealed that their actions were more about imitating human gestures than expressing original thoughts. Researchers discovered that apes were often responding to subtle human cues, leading to overly generous interpretations of their behavior. Many of the “conversations” were non-grammatical and consisted mostly of requests for food or affection, not complex or creative thoughts. While the idea of animals communicating in human language is emotionally appealing, the reality is more complex. Despite heartwarming anecdotes, evidence suggests that apes were not forming sentences or engaging in true language. Instead, much of their behavior was cherry-picked and over-interpreted. As a result, ape sign language is now viewed more as a product of human projection and wishful thinking than a breakthrough in animal communication. The heartwarming narratives surrounding Koko, while powerful, are now seen as part of a broader phenomenon where humans project their emotional desires onto animals, wanting to believe in deeper connections. The study of ape sign language has largely fallen out of favor in the scientific community, viewed now as more of an experiment in human-animal interaction than in animal communication. What was once celebrated as groundbreaking is now reinterpreted as a form of babbling—fascinating but far from the linguistic breakthrough

⁸⁰ Roc Morin (2015). What Koko the Sign-Language-Speaking Gorilla Can Teach Us About Being Human. [online] The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/08/koko-the-talking-gorilla-sign-language-francine-patterson/402307/>.

⁸¹ Hartsfield, T. (2022). Koko the Impostor: Ape sign language was a bunch of babbling nonsense. [online] Big Think. Available at: <https://bigthink.com/life/ape-sign-language/>.

once imagined. In the end, the story of Koko reflects not only the limitations of animal communication but also the complexity of human hopes and the tendency to understand the nature of language. It seems like the mere desire to communicate is seen as a form of intelligence, though it might not align with conventional definitions of cognitive intelligence, which often emphasize problem-solving, abstract thinking, or language-based reasoning. Communication itself is deeply tied to social and emotional intelligence, as it reflects an awareness of others, a need to connect, and the ability to share or respond to thoughts, emotions, and needs. In many species, including humans, the drive to communicate serves as a foundation for social bonding, survival, and cooperation. In the context of animals like Koko the gorilla, the desire to communicate—even if it doesn't meet the linguistic standards of human language—demonstrates a level of social intelligence. It shows an awareness of others and a need to bridge understanding. Even though Koko's signing may not have been a full linguistic expression, her willingness to use signs to express basic desires, emotions, and intentions highlights a fundamental aspect of intelligence: the drive to interact and relate with others in meaningful ways. Communication, whether through gestures, vocalizations, or other means, often indicates that an individual is capable of recognizing the existence of others and understanding the importance of connection. In this sense, the desire to communicate is an adaptive form of intelligence, deeply tied to survival and social dynamics, whether in humans or animals. What is the difference between the Babbling Gorilla using language for food and attention and the hundreds of authors who wrote thousands of articles about Koko the Talking Gorilla just for profit and popularity? Is it the way we use language as a tool that really separates us humans from apes and machines? What if some humans are using language like Koko the Imposter?

"Prisencolinensinainciusol"

The novel "Right Honourable Chimpanzee" by Georgi Markov and David Phillips satirizes political power and human stupidity, using the figure of a chimpanzee to symbolize the absurdity and primitiveness of political leaders and systems. The story revolves around a chimpanzee who, through a bizarre twist, is elected as a political leader. This serves as a commentary on how easily the mechanisms of politics can be manipulated, reflecting the irrationality and baselessness of much of political behavior. The chimpanzee, as a symbol, highlights the disconnection between the supposed intelligence required for governance and the reality of inept leadership driven by selfish, primitive instincts. This theme mirrors the use of monkeys in works like Banksy's depiction of Parliament, where monkeys replace human politicians, symbolizing the dysfunction and folly inherent in many political systems. In both the book and Banksy's work, the chimpanzee stands as a caricature of political incompetence, suggesting that leaders often act no better than animals, guided by base instincts rather than reason, wisdom, or moral integrity. This critique touches on broader themes of human stupidity, particularly how societies can be swayed or deceived into accepting inadequate or foolish leaders, underscoring the absurdity in the exercise of power and governance. In "Right Honourable Chimpanzee", the chimpanzee becomes a political leader not because of any inherent capability but through a process that highlights the irrationality of political systems. This mirrors the notion that humans in power often behave no better than animals trained to perform tasks. Similarly, Koko the gorilla, trained to use sign language, didn't truly understand the meaning behind the signs she was taught. Instead, she was merely mimicking her trainers to receive rewards like bananas—a behavior reflective of superficial learning without deep

comprehension. This connects to the famous allegory of “Havel’s Greengrocer” from Vaclav Havel’s “The Power of the Powerless”. The greengrocer hangs a slogan in his window, not because he believes in the ideology it represents, but because it is expected of him within a system that demands compliance. Like the chimpanzee mimicking political behavior or Koko repeating signs for bananas, the greengrocer engages in the ritual of ideology for personal survival and economic benefit, not because of genuine belief. In this way, people, like trained animals, may perform ideological acts (whether repeating slogans or voting for certain leaders) without truly engaging with the ideas behind them. Thus, both animals and people can be trained to mimic words and behaviors without understanding, serving as a powerful metaphor for the hollow repetition of political or ideological slogans in pursuit of personal gain, as highlighted in Havel’s critique of totalitarian systems. Stupidity, in its most insidious form, is not the same as ignorance—it is an active choice, a strategic decision to embrace a false reality or simplified view of the world. Unlike ignorance, which is merely the absence of knowledge, stupidity is often a conscious act of turning away from knowledge or understanding in favor of beliefs or behaviors that provide personal or material gain. In this sense, stupidity becomes a performance, a role that people play to maintain social, political, or economic advantage. This concept of strategic stupidity is vividly seen in many political and social systems, where individuals or groups pretend to believe in certain ideologies or narratives, not because they are genuinely convinced, but because it is in their best interest to do so. For instance, Václav Havel’s metaphor of the greengrocer hanging a political slogan in his shop window encapsulates this idea. The greengrocer doesn’t truly believe in the slogan, but displaying it helps him avoid trouble and potentially increases his profits, as it signals compliance with the regime’s expectations. In such cases, stupidity is weaponized as a means of survival and advancement within a flawed system. This kind of willful ignorance is not only a means of survival but often a highly successful strategy. People who adopt it can navigate through complex systems of power by avoiding critical thinking or dissent, thus avoiding consequences. As seen in many political contexts, pretending to believe or care about certain principles—even when they are clearly irrational—can lead to material success, power, and social acceptance. The refusal to engage with uncomfortable truths or question popular ideologies allows individuals to maintain their position without risking the disruption that knowledge or understanding might bring. In many ways, strategic stupidity is a highly adaptive form of intelligence, allowing individuals to thrive within restrictive, dogmatic, or hypocritical environments. It highlights the complexity of human behavior, where people are not merely passive recipients of ideas but active participants in constructing the realities that benefit them most. This form of stupidity, then, is not a failure of intellect but a calculated act of self-preservation or personal advancement, making it a powerful and pervasive tool in human society. Adriano Celentano’s 1972 song “Prisencolinensinainciusol” is a brilliant example of a successful babbling strategy. The lyrics are gibberish that mimics the sounds of American English. Celentano, an Italian singer, wanted to capture the feeling of how English sounds to non-English speakers, without using real words. The result is a string of pseudo-English syllables that sound like a legitimate song in English, even though the lyrics are entirely nonsensical. The song charted in several European countries in 1972 and remained popular throughout the 1970s. The song is both a satire and an experiment in communication through sound, showing how tone, rhythm, and delivery can create the illusion of meaning. Despite being meaningless, the song resonated with audiences around the world because of its infectious beat, vocal delivery, and the sense of familiarity it evokes. It

demonstrates how gibberish, when done skillfully, can still engage listeners emotionally and intellectually, even without actual words. In an interview⁸², Adriano Celentano explained that "Prisencolinensinainciusol" was inspired by his love for American music and slang, which he found easier to sing than Italian. He wanted to create a song that conveyed the "inability to communicate". To do this, he crafted lyrics that sounded like English but had no actual meaning, embodying the confusion of language. Celentano likened the song to the story of the Tower of Babel, where humanity's attempt to reach the heavens was thwarted by God, who confused their languages so they could no longer understand one another. This concept of language breakdown and miscommunication was the driving force behind the song's creation. Celentano's "Prisencolinensinainciusol" is a playful exploration of the confusion of languages, and it continues to be celebrated as a unique artistic achievement in music and culture.

The Babbling Man

Communication is not a perfect or flawless transmission of ideas; rather, it is often messy and fraught with errors, ambiguities, and emotional complexities. It seems obvious that the communication process inevitably includes elements like miscommunication, misunderstanding, absurdity, and even madness or nonsense as integral parts of the broader desire to communicate. This imperfection is what makes communication a deeply human (and sometimes animal) endeavor, driven by the need to connect despite these inherent obstacles. Maybe the difference between Koko the Imposter and The Babbling Man is not so far? Humans and animals are predictably irrational. Miscommunication and misunderstanding are natural byproducts of the communication process. People often interpret messages based on their own experiences, biases, and cultural contexts, leading to gaps in understanding. Absurdity and nonsense can arise when language or signals fail to align with the intended meaning, yet even these moments of confusion are part of the ongoing effort to make meaning. These breakdowns can sometimes lead to new forms of understanding or creativity, as individuals adapt, clarify, or reframe their messages. Stupidity and madness—often seen as failures of logic or reason—also play a role. These elements highlight the emotional and irrational dimensions of communication. For instance, emotional responses, impulsive reactions, or socially conditioned behaviors can sometimes override logical dialogue, but they are still expressions of the desire to engage with others, even when they seem irrational. Ultimately, communication is a dynamic and complex process that reflects the full range of human (and sometimes animal) experiences. The presence of miscommunication, absurdity, and even nonsense does not diminish the value of communication; rather, it underscores the depth of the desire to connect despite the barriers that arise. These imperfections make communication a living, evolving process rather than a static exchange of information. The cultural hero is often in a situation of a communication breakdown. The figure of the "fool" holds significant importance in the myths and narratives of civilization, both in ancient and modern times. Just remember "The Emperor's New Clothes"(1837) the literary folktale written by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, about a vain emperor who gets exposed by a child before his subjects. The original Indian version of the story appears in the "Līlāvatisāra" by Jinaratna (1283), a summary of a now-lost anthology of fables, the "Nirvāṇalīlāvati" by Jineśvara (1052). The tale has been translated into over 100 languages. The emperor continues his parade naked and proud, despite being exposed, because his power lies not in truth but in his ability to manipulate perception. Even though the people

⁸² NPR. (2012). It's Gibberish, But Italian Pop Song Still Means Something. [online] Available at: <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/164206468> [Accessed 24 Sep. 2024].

realize they've been fooled, they remain silent, either out of fear or the need to conform. The emperor's confidence in continuing the charade highlights how those in power can maintain control even when their deception is revealed. His pride symbolizes how authority often relies on the collective complicity of people, who choose to stay silent rather than confront obvious absurdities. Ultimately, the tale reflects how power thrives on manipulation and the public's unwillingness to challenge it. Only the child and the fool are able to speak truth to power, challenge societal norms, and expose the flaws or contradictions in a way that those bound by conventional wisdom cannot. The fool's childish wisdom is often seen as coming from an unexpected source: their simplicity, naivety, or even perceived madness makes them immune to the pretense and corruption that bind others. This archetype continues to resonate in films like "Being There"(1979) and "Forrest Gump"(1994). The "fool" often represents an outsider, someone perceived as lacking conventional intelligence or social awareness, yet their simplicity and innocence allow them to navigate the world in ways that reveal deeper truths about society, human nature, and the absurdities of power. In traditional myths and folklore, the fool plays a pivotal role as a truth-teller or a disruptor, often unburdened by the complexities of logic, status, or ambition. In "Being There", Chance the Gardener becomes an influential figure despite his lack of education or awareness of the world beyond gardening. His simple, almost nonsensical statements are interpreted by those around him as profound, reflecting how society often projects meaning onto figures that seem wise but are, in fact, detached from deeper understanding. His "foolishness" allows him to navigate the highest circles of power with ease, showing how absurdity and miscommunication can lead to influence and status in certain contexts. Similarly, Forrest Gump presents a character whose perceived limitations in intelligence allow him to move through life with remarkable success, largely because he approaches situations with sincerity, openness, and a lack of cynicism. Forrest's simplistic view of the world enables him to participate in major historical events and develop meaningful relationships without being bogged down by the complexities and struggles others face. His naivety gives him a kind of wisdom—rooted in kindness and perseverance—that allows him to thrive in an otherwise chaotic and unpredictable world. In both cases, these modern "fools" subvert traditional expectations of intelligence, offering a critique of societal structures and norms. They reveal that intelligence is not always what it seems, and that wisdom can come from unexpected places. Their stories highlight how absurdity, miscommunication, and simplicity can lead to deeper truths, reinforcing the ancient archetype of the fool as a figure who disrupts and enlightens. Thus, the fool remains a powerful truth-telling figure in culture, showing that beneath their apparent madness or simplicity lies an alternative form of wisdom that exposes the contradictions, absurdities, and follies of society.

Fear of stupidity

In "Who is Afraid of Stupidity?"⁸³ Yonathan Listik posits that the fear of stupidity is a fear reserved for the intelligent—those who recognize its destructive potential. Stupidity, unlike malice, is often unintentional, a byproduct of ignorance rather than a deliberate act of harm. This distinction is crucial, for while malice can be confronted and resisted, stupidity remains an insidious force, unyielding to reason and logic. However, this fear is not necessarily grounded in reality. When we examine historical atrocities like colonialism and eugenics, it becomes evident that these were not the products of stupidity but rather of a cold, calculated

⁸³ Listik, Yonathan(2021) Who is afraid of Stupidity? Available at: <https://www.philosophie.ch/attachment/374/download/Listik-paper+docx> [Accessed 25 Aug. 2024].

intelligence. The so-called progress of civilization has often been driven by a form of intelligence that rationalizes and justifies domination, violence, and dehumanization under the guise of order and reason. Intelligence, in its pursuit of totalizing knowledge and control, has been complicit in some of the darkest chapters of human history. The experiments of various economic policies with disastrous results are all examples of intelligence being wielded as a tool of oppression. These are not accidents of history; they are the logical outcomes of a civilization that equates intelligence with superiority and progress with domination. The narrative of progress, upheld by intelligence and reason, is often a veneer for systemic violence and control. The very constructs of rationality, agency, and citizenship are not objective truths but are instead products of a disciplinary regime that naturalizes and perpetuates inequality and oppression. Given this historical context, the question arises: why are we so afraid of stupidity? If intelligence has led us to such destructive ends, might stupidity offer an alternative? This is not to suggest that we should embrace ignorance, but rather that we should critically examine the assumptions and values that underpin our worship of intelligence. The concept of intelligence, as it is commonly understood, often serves to reinforce existing power structures. Those who deviate from the dominant narrative—whether they are labeled as stupid, irrational, or uneducated—are marginalized and silenced. Yet, as history has shown, the "intelligent" actions of those in power have often led to far greater harm than the so-called stupidity of the masses. In this light, perhaps we should not be so quick to dismiss stupidity. It may be that what we label as stupidity is simply a refusal to conform to the logic of domination and control. If intelligence is the driving force behind a civilization that perpetuates violence and inequality, then perhaps it is time to reconsider the value of stupidity—not as a lack of intelligence, but as a resistance to the destructive logic of progress. The political implications of this are significant. The desire to govern, to impose order and rationality, is inherently violent because it is always already a desire to dominate those who are deemed incapable of self-governance. In this sense, the fear of stupidity is a fear of losing control, of disrupting the established order. But perhaps this disruption is exactly what is needed. If civilization, as it is currently constructed, is defined by domination and violence, then embracing stupidity—however counterintuitive it may seem—could be a way to subvert that order. This is not a call to abandon intelligence but to critically interrogate the assumptions and values that underlie it. The imperative to be intelligent, to always seek the "best" and most "rational" solutions, may be leading us down a path of destruction. By challenging this imperative, we open up the possibility for alternative ways of thinking and being—ways that do not necessarily conform to the logic of domination and control. In conclusion, the collective phenomenon of stupidity, when viewed through the lens of language and communication, suggests that as societies grow and their languages become more complex, the potential for miscommunication and semantic entropy increases. This is not inherently negative; rather, it is a natural byproduct of social and linguistic evolution. By recognizing the limitations of intelligence and the potential value of what we dismiss as stupidity, we may begin to imagine new possibilities for a more just and equitable world.

Feast of Fools

Indeed, the emotional bond and the desire to connect with others—whether with "fools," or even animals—can be seen as more important, and perhaps more integral to human nature, than wisdom, rationality, or problem-solving alone. Human intelligence is not limited to abstract thought, logic, or technical solutions; it encompasses emotional intelligence, social

connection, empathy, and the capacity for deep, often irrational, relationships. These forms of intelligence are vital to survival, well-being, and the richness of human experience. The emotional bond we form with others, even those who may not fit conventional definitions of intelligence, speaks to the fundamentally social nature of humans. We are hardwired for connection. Our ability to form communities, families, and societies is not built solely on rational problem-solving but on our capacity to empathize, share emotions, and build relationships—even with those who might be seen as less intellectually capable. This emotional intelligence allows for deeper connections that can transcend logic and practical concerns. The figures of the fool, the simpleton, or even animals in myth, literature, and life often represent the purity of connection that exists beyond intellectual understanding. The fool or "idiot" often embodies a kind of wisdom that comes from sincerity, humility, and an unfiltered view of the world. They may not solve problems in a traditional sense, but their presence, innocence, and emotional depth offer a different kind of solution—one rooted in love, kindness, and authenticity. In this way, emotional bonds can be more intelligent in that they address deeper human needs for belonging, compassion, and trust, which are just as critical for human flourishing as rationality and wisdom. Furthermore, the relationships we form with animals, such as with Koko the gorilla, illustrate this same dynamic. Despite the limitations of animals in using human language or displaying rational problem-solving, the emotional connections we form with them are profound. These relationships highlight our deep-seated need to connect with beings beyond ourselves, and they reflect a form of intelligence that prioritizes empathy, care, and mutual understanding. In many ways, the desire to connect emotionally—even with those who appear to lack conventional intelligence—can be seen as a higher form of wisdom. It recognizes the complexity and beauty of human experience, where love, empathy, and connection often matter more than abstract knowledge or the ability to solve problems. This desire reflects a holistic form of intelligence that integrates emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions, rather than focusing purely on the cognitive or logical aspects of the mind. Ultimately, while rationality and problem-solving are essential to human progress, it is the emotional bonds and the ability to connect with others—fools, animals, or otherwise—that provide meaning, resilience, and depth to our lives. In this sense, the intelligence found in connection, empathy, and emotional relationships is not lesser but perhaps the most important aspect of what it means to be human. In the intricate tapestry of human communication, where language serves as both the loom and the thread, threads will inevitably fray, and patterns will blur. Stupidity, in this context, isn't just an unfortunate byproduct but a natural, even essential, element of the process. Just as planned obsolescence keeps our technological world in a state of perpetual renewal, the obsolescence of language—its gradual decay and transformation—ensures that communication remains a dynamic, evolving endeavor, albeit one riddled with the pitfalls of miscommunication and misunderstanding. The phenomenon of collective stupidity, particularly as it manifests in large linguistic groups, can be seen as a reflection of this inherent obsolescence. As language grows more complex, the chances for miscommunication multiply, and information, rather than being a pure conduit of understanding, often becomes waste—misinterpreted, misapplied, or simply lost in translation. This isn't merely a flaw in our systems of communication but a fundamental characteristic of them, one that has shaped the course of human civilization. It might seem, at first glance, that this linguistic entropy—this gradual decline into semantic confusion—is something to be lamented. But if we step back, we see that it's precisely this process that fuels innovation, creativity, and the continual reshaping of

culture. Stupidity, when viewed through this lens, is not merely a failure of intelligence but a necessary counterbalance, a force that challenges the status quo and prevents the rigidity of absolute certainty. In this light, we can appreciate the role of stupidity as a kind of evolutionary pressure, one that forces us to adapt, rethink, and reinvent. It's in the gaps and cracks of our understanding that new ideas take root. The mistakes, the miscommunications, the seemingly wasteful information—all these elements contribute to the ongoing renewal of language and thought. So, rather than fear the folly that accompanies our collective endeavors, perhaps we should recognize it as an integral part of the human experience. Stupidity, in its many forms, reminds us that language, like life, is in a constant state of flux, and it's this very impermanence that drives progress. It is a reminder that in our quest for understanding, we must also embrace misunderstandings, for they are the fertile ground from which new wisdom can grow.

“In Praise of Obsolescence” (in the style of Erasmus)

“Hail, O folly of words! I come to sing your praises in this age of endless verbosity, where the currency of language is minted not in the purity of meaning, but in the sheer abundance of words. How delightful it is to see that the creators of language—those noble writers, tireless media, industrious publishers, cunning politicians, and learned institutions—have mastered the art of making language itself disposable! For what value is there in plain speaking and clear understanding when there is profit to be had in the ceaseless churn of linguistic excess?

Consider the scholars, who once were guardians of wisdom. Now, they labor not for the pursuit of truth, but for the production of volume. The academic presses overflow with books and journals, each more esoteric than the last, each more fleeting in its relevance. In their hands, language is not a tool for clarity, but a commodity to be repackaged and sold anew with each passing season. The pursuit of knowledge has become the pursuit of novelty, and in this, dear folly, they have become your most loyal servants.

The media, too, have embraced your doctrine with fervor. News is no longer about informing the public, but about filling the airwaves and screens with a torrent of words. The content must be endless, the cycle unbroken, for the true value lies not in the message, but in the constant, unrelenting production of language. Whether understood or not, whether meaningful or not, the words must flow, for it is in their sheer quantity that the profit lies.

Publishers, once the gatekeepers of literary merit, now thrive on this planned obsolescence. They know well that a timeless book is a book that cannot be sold again. And so, they encourage the creation of works that will quickly fade, to be replaced by the next wave of linguistic products. How splendid it is that they have turned language into a consumable, where the value is found not in what is said, but in how quickly it can be forgotten, and how soon it can be replaced.

Politicians, ever the clever strategists, have also learned your ways. They speak not to be understood, but to obfuscate, to cloud the minds of the masses with an ever-shifting array of slogans, buzzwords, and empty rhetoric. For in confusion lies power, and in the constant

reinvention of language, they maintain their control. They craft speeches that are destined to be obsolete before the ink is dry, for a language that is stable and clear is a language that does not serve their ends.

Even the institutions of education, where one might hope for refuge from this madness, have succumbed. They teach not the enduring principles of clear thought and expression, but the ever-changing lexicon of the day. Students are trained not to communicate with clarity, but to navigate the labyrinth of jargon that is constantly being constructed and deconstructed. They are prepared not for a life of understanding, but for a life of constant linguistic consumption, where the goal is not to say something worth saying, but to say something new.

And so, O folly, you reign supreme in this world of planned obsolescence. Language, once the means of human connection and understanding, has become a tool for profit and power. We are no longer concerned with the truth of our words, but with their quantity, with their marketability, with their ability to generate more language. We are lost in a sea of words, adrift on a tide of endless, meaningless language, and it is you, folly, who have led us here.

But let us not despair, for in this grand spectacle of obsolescence, there is a kind of beauty, a kind of twisted genius. After all, what could be more fitting for a world so obsessed with progress, so enamored with the new, than to make language itself a victim of planned obsolescence? And so, let us praise this folly, this absurdity, for it is the truest reflection of the age in which we live. Hail to the entropy of endless words! Hail to the language that is here today and gone tomorrow! The conspiracy of speech that it is made to break. The Falling Tower of Babble. Hail to the folly of obsolescence!”

Conclusion: When Language Outlives Thought: Utopias of the Dead

Ghosts of Meaning: Inherited Utopias

Every civilisation inherits not only its institutions, its monuments, and its technologies, but also its sentences. These sentences—phrases once uttered with urgency, conviction, and existential necessity—do not disappear when their speakers vanish. They persist, sedimented into language itself, repeated long after their originating contexts have dissolved. What remains is not thought, but its residue: a spectral vocabulary that continues to organise perception, action, and belief. In this sense, the modern world is not merely built upon the past; it is spoken by it. The central problem is not that people remember too much, but that language remembers too well. Words do not forget. Concepts do not decay at the same rate as the realities they once described. Instead, they continue to circulate, detached from their original referents, forming what may be called inherited utopias—linguistic constructions of ideal worlds that no longer exist, and perhaps never did, yet still exert normative force. These utopias are not visions of the future but ghosts of past futures, endlessly replayed through the machinery of speech. What was once a living project becomes a dead script. The revolutionary slogans of one century become the bureaucratic clichés of the next. Ideals that once mobilised bodies and transformed

societies are reduced to empty signifiers, repeated out of habit rather than conviction. The tragedy is not simply that meaning is lost, but that its absence is concealed. Language continues to function, to produce coherence, to simulate understanding, even when it no longer corresponds to any lived reality. This is the paradox of linguistic persistence: the more stable the form, the more likely it is to outlive its content.

In this framework, utopia must be reconsidered not as a destination, but as a linguistic artefact. It is a structure of expectation embedded in language, a promise encoded in words that continues to operate regardless of its feasibility. Once articulated, a utopia becomes difficult to erase. It enters discourse, reproduces itself through repetition, and acquires an authority independent of its origin. The authors of these visions—philosophers, prophets, ideologues—disappear, but their formulations remain, circulating as if they still possessed the same urgency and truth. The consequence is a world governed by second-hand intentions. People act not on the basis of immediate understanding, but through inherited frameworks of meaning that shape what can be thought, desired, or imagined. These frameworks are rarely questioned because they are embedded in the very medium of questioning itself. To speak is already to participate in a system of prior assumptions, to inhabit a structure of meaning that precedes the individual. Thus, language becomes both the archive and the prison of utopia. This condition produces a peculiar form of temporal dislocation. The present is continually interpreted through categories that belong to the past, while the future is imagined using concepts that have already failed. Innovation becomes impossible not because of a lack of creativity, but because the available linguistic tools are exhausted. Every attempt to articulate something new is immediately captured by old forms, translated into familiar patterns, and neutralised. In this way, the persistence of language ensures the stagnation of thought.

The notion of progress, so central to many inherited utopias, becomes especially problematic under these conditions. Progress presupposes a direction, a movement towards a defined goal. But when the language that defines that goal is itself obsolete, progress becomes circular. Society advances technologically while remaining conceptually static, trapped in narratives that no longer correspond to its realities. The result is a disjunction between what is done and what is said, between action and interpretation. Language lags behind experience, yet continues to dictate its meaning. At the same time, these inherited utopias are not entirely without function. They provide a sense of continuity, a shared vocabulary that enables communication across generations. They stabilise expectations and offer frameworks within which collective action can occur. Without them, social life would risk fragmentation into incommensurable perspectives. The problem, therefore, is not their existence, but their uncritical persistence. When inherited meanings are treated as self-evident truths rather than historical constructs, they become obstacles rather than resources. The critical task is not to abandon language, which would be impossible, but to recognise its temporal layers. To speak is always to engage with the past, but this engagement can be made conscious. Instead of repeating inherited utopias as if they were still viable, one can expose their conditions of emergence, their limits, and their transformations. This does not eliminate their influence, but it alters the relationship to them. They become objects of reflection rather than invisible determinants of thought.

However, such reflection is difficult because language itself resists it. The tools used to analyse inherited meanings are themselves part of the same system. There is no external position from which language can be fully observed or controlled. This is the deeper implication

of the argument: that the autonomy of language is not absolute, but it is sufficient to constrain human agency in significant ways. People do not simply use language; they are used by it, shaped by structures that operate below the level of conscious intention. In this light, the idea of authorship must also be reconsidered. The creators of utopias are often seen as originators of new ideas, but their innovations are always articulated within existing linguistic frameworks. What appears as originality is often a recombination of available elements, a reconfiguration of inherited meanings. Once expressed, these ideas enter the same cycle of persistence and transformation, becoming part of the linguistic environment that will shape future thought. The author disappears, but the structure remains. The image of ‘dead men’s utopias’ captures this dynamic precisely. It is not that the ideas are irrelevant or entirely false, but that they continue to operate independently of their creators and contexts. They are neither fully alive nor completely dead. They exist in a liminal state, sustained by repetition, capable of influencing action, yet detached from any living source of meaning. To inhabit language is to live among these ghosts, to navigate a landscape populated by the remnants of past intentions.

Thus, the conclusion is not a simple rejection of utopia, nor a nostalgic return to some imagined purity of speech. It is an acknowledgment of the entropic nature of language, of its tendency to accumulate, distort, and outlast the thoughts it was meant to convey. Inherited utopias are both the condition of possibility for communication and its fundamental limitation. They enable shared meaning while simultaneously constraining its renewal. The challenge, then, is to develop a form of linguistic awareness that can operate within this paradox. To recognise that every word carries a history, that every concept is layered with prior uses, and that meaning is never entirely present, but always mediated by what has been said before. Such awareness does not dissolve the ghosts, but it changes how one moves among them. It transforms language from an invisible structure into a visible problem. In this sense, the persistence of inherited utopias is not merely a theoretical issue, but a practical one. It affects how societies organise themselves, how individuals understand their place within them, and how possibilities for change are imagined or foreclosed. To confront this persistence is to confront the limits of language itself, and with it, the limits of thought. And yet, within these limits, there remains a space—however narrow—for transformation. Not through the invention of entirely new languages, but through a reconfiguration of existing ones, a deliberate effort to disrupt repetition and expose its mechanisms. Whether such efforts can succeed is uncertain. But the alternative is clear: a world in which language continues to outlive thought, and in doing so, governs it.

The Persistence of the Impossible: Dead Men’s Worlds

If inherited utopias are the ghosts of meaning, then dead men’s worlds are the environments those ghosts continue to inhabit. They are not merely abstract linguistic residues, but structured realities—systems of institutions, norms, and expectations that have been built, maintained, and justified through language long after their originating visions have lost coherence. What persists is not only the word, but the world it once helped to construct. In this sense, language does not simply outlive thought; it stabilises the impossible and renders it habitable. The impossible, in this context, is not that which cannot exist, but that which cannot be realised in the way it is continually described. Dead men’s worlds are sustained by descriptions that no longer correspond to lived conditions, yet continue to organise them. These worlds operate through a fundamental disjunction: they require belief in concepts that reality

no longer supports, while simultaneously suppressing recognition of this gap. The persistence of the impossible is therefore not a failure of reason, but a function of linguistic inertia. Every political system, every institutional framework, carries within it a vocabulary that once justified its emergence. Terms such as justice, equality, freedom, progress—each of these has a history, a moment in which it functioned as a concrete aspiration tied to specific conditions. Over time, however, these terms detach from their contexts and begin to circulate independently. They are repeated not because they describe reality, but because they are necessary for the maintenance of the system that invokes them. In this way, language becomes a mechanism for sustaining worlds that would otherwise collapse under the weight of their contradictions. Dead men's worlds persist because they are encoded in routines. Bureaucratic procedures, legal frameworks, educational systems, media narratives—all of these operate through fixed linguistic forms that resist change. The repetition of these forms produces a sense of continuity and legitimacy, even when the underlying realities have shifted. The impossible becomes normalised through iteration. What cannot be justified in a single moment is rendered acceptable through constant repetition across time.

This repetition creates a condition in which contradiction is no longer experienced as a problem, but as a background noise. Individuals learn to navigate these worlds by compartmentalising meaning, accepting that words may function differently in different contexts without requiring resolution. A term like 'freedom' may signify autonomy in one discourse, obligation in another, and constraint in a third, yet the system remains stable because these meanings are not forced into confrontation. The impossible persists precisely because it is never fully articulated. At the same time, dead men's worlds generate their own forms of resistance, but these too are often captured within the same linguistic structures. Critique is expressed using the vocabulary of the system it opposes, which limits its capacity to produce genuine transformation. To argue against a concept such as progress, for example, one must still operate within a framework that assumes progress as a meaningful category. In this way, opposition becomes another mode of repetition, reinforcing the persistence of the impossible rather than dismantling it. The temporal dimension of these worlds is crucial. They are oriented towards a future that is always deferred, a horizon that recedes as one approaches it. This is the logic of the utopian promise: the ideal is never realised, but its non-realisation is continually explained, justified, and postponed. The failure of the project does not invalidate it; instead, it becomes evidence that more effort is required, that the conditions are not yet right, that the vision remains valid but incomplete. The impossible is thus preserved through perpetual deferral. This deferral has a profound effect on human experience. It creates a sense of living in transition, of inhabiting a world that is always on the verge of becoming something else. Stability is undermined not by change, but by the constant anticipation of change. People are encouraged to orient their lives towards futures that never arrive, to invest in narratives that remain perpetually out of reach. The result is a form of existential suspension, in which the present is devalued in favour of an imagined future that is itself structured by inherited language.

Dead men's worlds also rely on a selective memory. While language preserves certain concepts with remarkable fidelity, it simultaneously obscures the conditions under which they were produced. Historical context is simplified, abstracted, or erased, allowing concepts to appear timeless and universal. This process transforms contingent ideas into apparent necessities. What was once a response to specific circumstances becomes a general principle,

detached from its origins and resistant to critique. In this context, the role of expertise becomes ambiguous. Experts are often tasked with interpreting and maintaining these worlds, translating their contradictions into manageable forms. Yet they too operate within the same linguistic frameworks, which limits their capacity to recognise the extent of the problem. Their analyses may refine the system, make it more efficient or more coherent, but they rarely challenge its underlying assumptions. Expertise becomes a form of stabilisation rather than transformation. The persistence of the impossible is further reinforced by technological mediation. Modern communication systems amplify repetition, accelerate the circulation of language, and extend the reach of inherited concepts. Digital platforms, in particular, favour brevity, immediacy, and recognisability, which encourages the reuse of familiar terms and narratives. The result is an intensification of linguistic inertia, as the same phrases are reproduced across vast networks with minimal variation. Dead men's worlds are not only preserved but multiplied, existing simultaneously in countless iterations. Despite this, there are moments when the impossibility becomes visible. Crises—economic, political, ecological—can expose the gap between language and reality, revealing the fragility of the systems that depend on it. In such moments, the persistence of inherited concepts is no longer sufficient to maintain coherence. Words begin to lose their authority, their capacity to organise experience diminishes, and the underlying contradictions come to the surface. These are moments of potential transformation, but they are also moments of instability, in which the absence of shared meaning can lead to fragmentation and conflict.

The question, then, is whether it is possible to move beyond dead men's worlds without abandoning the structures that make collective life possible. Complete rupture is neither feasible nor necessarily desirable, as it would entail the loss of continuity and the dissolution of shared frameworks. Yet simple reform is insufficient, as it leaves the underlying linguistic structures intact. What is required is a form of engagement that can operate within these worlds while simultaneously revealing their limitations. Such engagement involves a reorientation of attention. Instead of focusing solely on the content of language—what is being said—one must attend to its form, its patterns of repetition, its historical layers. This shift allows for a different kind of critique, one that does not merely challenge specific ideas, but examines the conditions under which those ideas persist. It opens the possibility of disrupting the mechanisms of repetition, of introducing variations that can alter the trajectory of inherited meanings. However, this process is inherently uncertain. There is no guarantee that new configurations of language will not themselves become the dead worlds of the future. Every attempt to articulate a new vision carries within it the seeds of its own persistence, the potential to outlive its context and become another ghost in the system. This is the unavoidable consequence of linguistic existence: to speak is to create structures that may endure beyond intention. Therefore, the persistence of the impossible must be understood not as a problem that can be solved once and for all, but as a condition to be managed. It requires a continuous effort to balance continuity and change, to preserve what is necessary while allowing for transformation. This balance cannot be achieved through fixed rules or definitive solutions; it must be negotiated in practice, through ongoing engagement with language and its effects.

Dead men's worlds will continue to exist as long as language itself persists. They are an intrinsic feature of symbolic communication, a reflection of its capacity to extend beyond the limits of individual thought. The task is not to eliminate them, but to recognise their presence, to understand their dynamics, and to navigate them with a degree of awareness that prevents

total submission to their logic. In this way, the persistence of the impossible becomes not only a constraint, but also a site of possibility. It reveals the limits of inherited meaning, but also the potential for its reconfiguration. Within the repetition of language, there is always the possibility of difference, however small. Whether this difference can accumulate into meaningful change remains an open question. But it is within this narrow space that the future of thought—and of language—continues to unfold.

When Ideas Refuse to Die: The Utopian Trap

If dead men's worlds describe the persistence of impossible structures, then the utopian trap names the mechanism that sustains them from within. It is not only that ideas survive their authors, nor that they continue to organise reality beyond their relevance; it is that they resist termination. They refuse to die not because they are true, but because they are embedded in language in such a way that their disappearance would require the dismantling of the very structures through which meaning is produced. The utopian trap is therefore not an ideological error, but a linguistic condition. At its core lies a simple but profound asymmetry: it is easier for language to preserve than to erase. Once an idea has been articulated, it enters a system of repetition that does not depend on its validity. It can be quoted, reformulated, institutionalised, ritualised. It can be taught, legislated, aestheticised. It can be embedded in education, in law, in media, in everyday speech. Each repetition reinforces its presence, regardless of whether it continues to correspond to reality. In this sense, ideas do not persist because they convince, but because they circulate. This circulation creates the illusion of necessity. An idea that is everywhere appears unavoidable. It becomes part of the background of thought, a condition rather than a proposition. To question it is not simply to challenge a claim, but to disrupt a network of meanings that extends far beyond any single statement. The resistance encountered in such questioning is therefore not only intellectual, but structural. It is the resistance of language itself, which seeks to maintain coherence through continuity. The utopian trap operates by converting contingency into inevitability. What was once a possibility becomes an expectation; what was once a proposal becomes a norm. The language of utopia is particularly susceptible to this transformation because it is oriented towards ideals that cannot be fully realised. Its promises are always deferred, its criteria always adjustable. Failure does not invalidate the idea; it redefines the conditions of its fulfilment. In this way, utopia becomes self-immunising, capable of absorbing contradiction without collapsing.

This self-immunisation is reinforced by moralisation. Utopian ideas are rarely presented as neutral descriptions; they are framed as ethical imperatives. To question them is not merely to disagree, but to risk being positioned outside the moral community that they define. Language thus enforces adherence not only through repetition, but through the distribution of legitimacy. Certain terms acquire a normative weight that makes their rejection difficult without social consequence. The utopian trap is therefore sustained not only by linguistic inertia, but by moral pressure. At the same time, the trap is maintained through a subtle form of semantic flexibility. Utopian concepts are rarely fixed; they are adaptable, capable of shifting their meanings in response to changing conditions. This flexibility allows them to remain relevant even as their original contexts disappear. A term like 'equality', for instance, can be reinterpreted across different domains—economic, political, cultural—without losing its apparent coherence. This capacity for reinterpretation ensures that the idea can survive critique by transforming itself. However, this transformation is not without cost. As meanings expand and shift, they become increasingly abstract, detached from specific practices or conditions.

The idea gains breadth at the expense of precision. It becomes more inclusive, but also more vague. This vagueness is not accidental; it is functional. It allows the idea to accommodate multiple interpretations, to be adopted by different groups for different purposes, and thus to persist across contexts. The utopian trap relies on this ambiguity to maintain its reach. The role of institutions in this process is decisive. Institutions act as carriers of utopian language, embedding it in durable forms that extend beyond individual lifespans. Educational systems transmit it to new generations; legal systems codify it into rules; media systems amplify it across populations. Through these mechanisms, ideas acquire a form of structural permanence. They are no longer dependent on belief alone; they are supported by practices that reproduce them regardless of individual conviction.

This institutionalisation creates a feedback loop. The more an idea is embedded in structures, the more it appears real; the more real it appears, the more it justifies its continued embedding. The distinction between description and prescription collapses. Language no longer merely represents reality; it participates in its production. The utopian trap thus becomes a self-reinforcing system, in which ideas sustain the structures that sustain them. Yet the persistence of these ideas is not total. There are always points of friction where language encounters resistance from experience. When the gap between what is said and what is lived becomes too wide, the coherence of the system begins to break down. People may continue to use the same words, but their meanings become unstable, contested, fragmented. This instability can lead to the emergence of new discourses, but it can also result in confusion and disorientation. The breakdown of one utopian framework does not automatically produce another; it may simply expose the absence of any shared framework. In such moments, the temptation is to replace one utopia with another, to seek a new set of ideas that can restore coherence and direction. But this response risks reproducing the same trap in a different form. The problem is not the specific content of the utopia, but the structure of its persistence. Any idea that becomes embedded in language to the point of inevitability is susceptible to the same dynamics of detachment, repetition, and self-immunisation. The alternative is not to abandon utopian thinking altogether, but to alter the way it is engaged. Instead of treating utopian ideas as fixed goals or final states, they can be approached as provisional constructs, tools for orientation rather than destinations. This requires a shift from belief to use, from adherence to experimentation. Language, in this sense, becomes a medium for exploration rather than a repository of inherited truths.

Such a shift demands a different kind of linguistic practice. It involves a willingness to let ideas expire, to recognise when their conditions of relevance have passed, and to resist the impulse to preserve them beyond their usefulness. This is difficult because it runs counter to the inherent tendencies of language, which favours retention over deletion. It requires an active effort to introduce discontinuity, to create spaces where repetition is interrupted and new forms can emerge. However, even this effort is subject to the same constraints it seeks to overcome. The language used to critique the utopian trap is itself part of the system. It cannot fully escape the structures of persistence; it can only modify them. This is the paradox of reflexivity: to analyse language is to use language, to attempt to step outside it is to remain within it. The trap is therefore not something that can be entirely avoided, but something that must be continually negotiated. The refusal of ideas to die is thus both a problem and a condition of possibility. It limits the capacity for renewal, but it also provides the continuity that makes communication possible. Without persistence, there would be no shared language, no common ground on which

to build or to critique. The challenge is to maintain this continuity without allowing it to solidify into rigidity, to keep language alive without letting it become autonomous.

In this sense, the utopian trap is not an external constraint imposed on thought, but an internal feature of linguistic existence. It arises from the very mechanisms that enable meaning to be produced and shared. To engage with it is to engage with the limits of language itself, to recognise that every attempt to articulate a better world carries within it the risk of becoming another inherited illusion. Thus, when ideas refuse to die, it is not because they possess an inherent vitality, but because language grants them a form of afterlife. They continue to speak, even when no one is speaking them, shaping the contours of thought and action in ways that are often invisible. To become aware of this process is not to escape it, but to see it more clearly, to understand that every word carries not only a meaning, but a history, and that within this history lies both the promise and the danger of utopia.

Living in Borrowed Futures: Dead Men's Designs

If the utopian trap explains why ideas refuse to die, then borrowed futures describe how they continue to organise life after their time has passed. It is not only that people inherit concepts, or inhabit structures built by others; it is that they project themselves forward using designs that were never their own. The future, in this sense, is not discovered but inherited, not created but repeated. It arrives already shaped, already spoken, already constrained by the language of those who imagined it before. To live in a borrowed future is to move within a horizon that feels open but is already determined. The vocabulary through which the future is imagined—progress, innovation, development, emancipation—does not emerge from the present as a response to its conditions. It is carried forward from prior formulations, reactivated in new contexts, yet retaining the assumptions embedded within it. These assumptions operate silently, structuring what can be expected, what can be desired, and what can be recognised as possible. The future becomes a continuation of past language rather than a rupture from it. Dead men's designs persist not because they are accurate, but because they are available. They offer ready-made frameworks for interpreting uncertainty, templates for organising collective aspiration. Faced with the indeterminacy of what lies ahead, societies reach for familiar forms. They repeat the architectures of expectation that have already been articulated, even when these architectures no longer correspond to current realities. The future is thus stabilised through repetition, rendered intelligible by being made predictable in advance. This predictability is deceptive. It produces a sense of orientation, but at the cost of constraining imagination. When the future is described using inherited language, it becomes difficult to conceive of alternatives that fall outside that language. Possibility is reduced to variation within a fixed framework. Even radical visions are often expressed in terms that reproduce the very structures they seek to overcome. The borrowed future is therefore not only limiting; it is self-confirming. It ensures that new developments are interpreted as confirmations of existing narratives rather than as challenges to them.

In this way, time itself becomes recursive. The future is folded back into the past, not as repetition in the strict sense, but as a reactivation of prior meanings. Historical trajectories appear to advance, yet their underlying logic remains unchanged. This produces a peculiar form of stagnation disguised as movement. Societies innovate technologically, transform materially, expand in scale, yet remain bound to conceptual frameworks that were formulated under entirely different conditions. The result is a disjunction between the novelty of experience and

the familiarity of its description. The persistence of borrowed futures is closely tied to the authority of planning. Modern societies are deeply invested in the idea that the future can be designed, predicted, managed. This investment is expressed through institutions that produce projections, scenarios, strategies—linguistic constructions that attempt to render the unknown knowable. Yet these constructions rely on categories inherited from the past. They extend existing concepts forward rather than generating new ones. Planning thus becomes an exercise in repetition, projecting old ideas into new contexts. This repetition is not neutral. It carries with it the values, priorities, and assumptions of those who originally articulated the designs. Dead men's futures are not empty forms; they are structured by particular visions of order, hierarchy, and possibility. To inhabit these futures is therefore to participate in a continuity that is not of one's own making. It is to live according to scripts that were written under conditions that no longer exist, yet continue to exert influence through the persistence of language. At the level of everyday life, this manifests as a subtle form of alienation. Individuals are encouraged to orient their actions towards goals that have been defined in advance, to measure their success according to criteria that they did not create. The language of aspiration—career, achievement, fulfilment—carries implicit models of what a life should be. These models are rarely examined because they are embedded in the very terms through which self-understanding is articulated. To question them is to risk losing the framework within which meaning is constructed.

This alienation is intensified by the acceleration of communication. In a world saturated with language, the repetition of inherited futures becomes constant, ubiquitous. Media systems, educational institutions, digital platforms all contribute to the continuous reinforcement of familiar narratives. The future is not only imagined; it is broadcast, circulated, consumed. It becomes a shared spectacle, a collective expectation that is constantly reaffirmed. The result is a narrowing of imaginative space, as alternative possibilities are overshadowed by dominant narratives. Yet the persistence of borrowed futures is not absolute. There are moments when the mismatch between inherited designs and lived reality becomes too pronounced to ignore. Crises disrupt the continuity of expectation, exposing the limits of existing frameworks. In such moments, the language of the past may no longer suffice to describe the present, let alone the future. This creates a space of uncertainty, in which the authority of inherited concepts is weakened and new articulations become possible. However, this space is unstable. The absence of established frameworks can lead to confusion, fragmentation, and conflict. Without a shared language, collective action becomes difficult to coordinate. The temptation is therefore to return to familiar forms, to reassert the language of borrowed futures even when its inadequacy has been revealed. The cycle repeats: disruption followed by restoration, critique followed by repetition. The persistence of dead men's designs is thus maintained not only by inertia, but by the need for coherence. The challenge is to navigate this tension without collapsing into either rigid continuity or total disintegration. To do so requires a different relationship to language, one that recognises its historical depth without being determined by it. It involves treating inherited concepts not as fixed guides, but as provisional tools, subject to revision and, when necessary, abandonment. This does not mean rejecting the past, but engaging with it critically, understanding the conditions under which its ideas were formed and the limits of their applicability.

Such engagement also demands an awareness of the generative potential of language. While it constrains, it also enables. The same mechanisms that allow ideas to persist also allow for their transformation. Repetition need not be identical; it can introduce variation, shift

emphasis, create new connections. Within the inherited vocabulary, there are possibilities for reconfiguration, for articulating meanings that diverge from established patterns. The borrowed future can be altered from within, not by replacing its language entirely, but by reworking it. This process is necessarily gradual and uncertain. There is no clear boundary between repetition and innovation, no definitive point at which the borrowed becomes the new. Change occurs through accumulation, through small deviations that, over time, alter the structure of meaning. These deviations may initially appear insignificant, but they can reshape the horizon of possibility by expanding what can be said and, therefore, what can be thought. Nevertheless, the risk remains that new articulations will themselves become inherited, that they will solidify into the dead designs of the future. This is not a failure, but an inherent feature of linguistic existence. Every act of articulation creates the conditions for its own persistence. The goal, therefore, cannot be to escape this cycle entirely, but to remain attentive to it, to resist the tendency of language to become invisible, to treat its structures as given rather than constructed. In this sense, living in borrowed futures is not a condition that can be eliminated, but one that can be understood and negotiated. It requires a form of vigilance, a continuous effort to examine the language through which the future is imagined, to identify its origins, its assumptions, its limits. This vigilance does not guarantee freedom from inherited designs, but it creates the possibility of partial autonomy, of acting with an awareness of the constraints that shape action.

The conclusion of this inquiry is therefore not a definitive resolution, but a reorientation. It shifts the focus from the content of specific utopias to the conditions of their persistence, from the question of which ideas are true to the question of how ideas continue to operate. It reveals that the problem is not simply that language can misrepresent reality, but that it can outlive the thoughts it was meant to express, continuing to organise life in their absence. To recognise this is to confront a fundamental paradox: that the very medium through which people seek to understand and transform the world is also the medium that limits that understanding and transformation. Language is both the instrument and the obstacle, the condition of possibility and the source of constraint. It enables the projection of futures, but it also binds those futures to the past. Thus, to live in borrowed futures is to inhabit this paradox, to move within a world that is at once inherited and open, determined and contingent. It is to acknowledge that the future cannot be entirely freed from the language of the past, but also that this language is not immutable. Within its structures, there remains a space—narrow, fragile, but real—for reinterpretation, for deviation, for the emergence of meanings that were not fully anticipated. Whether this space can be expanded, whether it can sustain forms of life that are not simply repetitions of dead men's designs, remains uncertain. But uncertainty is not a deficiency; it is the condition under which new possibilities can arise. The borrowed future is not a prison with fixed walls, but a landscape shaped by language, capable of being altered, however gradually, by those who move within it.

In the end, the persistence of inherited utopias, the endurance of dead men's worlds, the refusal of ideas to die, and the continuation of borrowed futures all point to a single insight: that language has a life of its own. It exceeds the intentions of its speakers, outlasts their contexts, and organises reality in ways that are both enabling and constraining. To engage with this life is to engage with the limits of thought itself, and to recognise that every attempt to speak the future is also an act of inheriting the past. Language remembers what humanity has forgotten; and in that memory, it quietly decides the future. Every civilisation is built with words, but it is buried beneath the ones it cannot stop repeating. When words survive their meanings, they

become the architects of worlds no one truly inhabits. We do not think the future—we inherit it, sentence by sentence, from voices that no longer exist. The future does not arrive—it is spoken in advance by the dead, and lived by the living as if it were their own. When language outlives thought, the dead do not disappear—they continue speaking as the future. Language does not die with those who speak it. It accumulates, repeats, and persists, carrying within it the designs of worlds that no longer exist yet continue to organise the present. What people call the future is often nothing more than the prolonged echo of inherited sentences—visions articulated by the dead, stabilised through repetition, and lived by the living as if they were their own. When words survive their meanings, they cease to describe reality and begin to govern it. In that moment, thought no longer leads language; it follows it, confined within structures it did not create and cannot easily escape. The greatest illusion of modernity is not that people control language, but that they believe they think independently of it. In reality, they move within structures that precede them, speak through concepts they did not form, and imagine futures already articulated long before their arrival. The persistence of language is the persistence of these structures: a continuity that binds generations not through memory alone, but through the silent authority of inherited words. What remains unexamined is not simply language itself, but the extent to which it has already decided what can be thought.

‘Language is not a tool of knowledge but its greatest obstacle.’

— Fritz Mauthner

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